LUFTWAFFE COLOURS

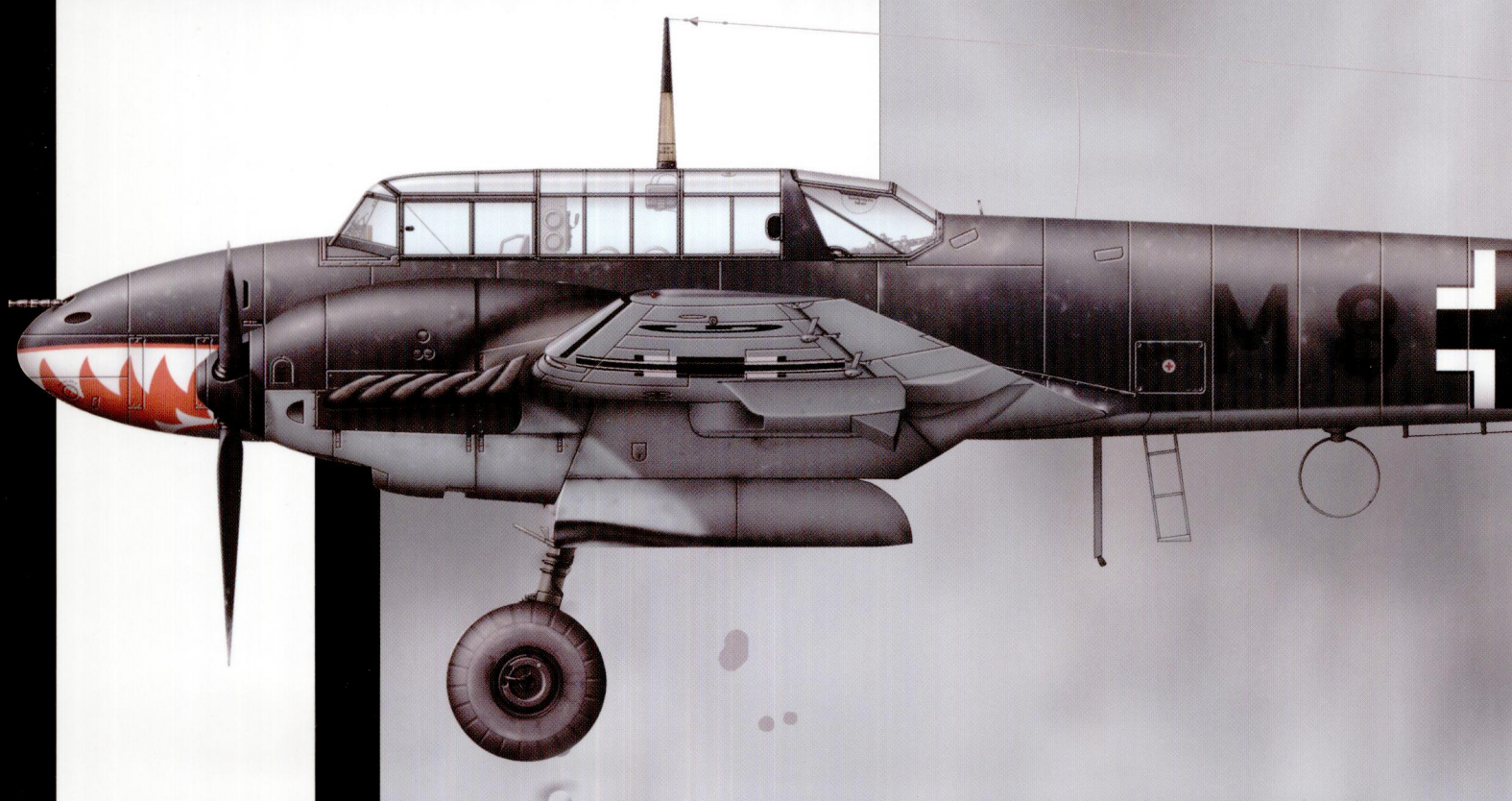
CLASSIC COLOURS

# ZERSTÖRER

Volume One

John J. Vasco

## LUFTWAFFE FIGHTER-BOMBERS AND DESTROYERS 1936-1940



# LUFTWAFFE FIGHTER-BOMBERS AND DESTROYERS

1936
1940

*"From 1938 onwards, the Luftwaffe had developed the Me 110 twin-engined fighter; called the "heavy" or "destroyer" fighter (Zerstörer). The role of this fighter was theoretically to be the pursuit of enemy formations operating over the Reich or returning over their own territory. In point of fact many squadrons of these aircraft were employed as fighter-bombers in the early war campaigns. The twin-engine fighter was something new in German pre-war concepts, and in the Staff College lectures its experimental nature was constantly emphasised."*

From 'The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force 1933-1945',
issued by the Air Ministry (A.C.A.S. [I], 1948)

# The twin-engined heavy fighter: concept and development

The genesis of the *Messerschmitt* 110 evolved out of a requirement of the German Air Ministry in the early months of 1934 for a twin-engined heavy fighter, which would be given the name '*Zerstörer*', literally 'Destroyer', which could cleave a path ahead of bomber formations, and that could also carry out the role of strategic reconnaissance and bomber. By June 1934 the project had been put out to tender to *Arado*, *Dornier*, *Focke-Wulf*, *Heinkel*, *Henschel* and *Bayerische Flugzeugwerke (Messerschmitt)*. The timetable issued to these companies specified that the mock-ups were to be ready by February 1935, and the first aircraft by February 1936. Following on swiftly from the issue of the tender, in July 1934 the Air Ministry issued contracts to *Focke-Wulf*, *Henschel* and *Bayerische Flugzeugwerke* for the development of the *Zerstörer* concept, along with the *Erprobungsstelle* (Test Centre for the Luftwaffe), the latter undertaking a multiplicity of tasks in the testing of all aspects of development of the model. Competition for the *Bf 110* would come in the form of the *Fw 157* and *Hs 124*.

The Air Ministry's further requirement for a high-speed bomber in the spring of 1935 resulted in the *Bf 110* gravitating towards a pure '*Zerstörer*' concept. As a result, the inadequacies of the other two designs led inexorably to the *Bf 110* being the favoured design for the '*Zerstörer*' role. By November 1935, this was confirmed. The Air Ministry also took the view at this time that the *Bf 110* mock-up lent itself to a bomber configuration. This clearly shows that even before the maiden test flight of the *Bf 110*, *Luftwaffe* thinking had envisaged the aircraft not only as a machine that would clear a path for bomber formations, but which would also undertake duties as a ground-attack aircraft in support of German ground forces. It was also at this time that the Air Ministry unequivocally stated that the term '*Bf*' for *Messerschmitt* aircraft types should be used; '*Me*' was not to be accepted on documents in order to ensure consistency in aircraft type designations.

Finally, on 12 May 1936, the *Bf 110 V1* took off on its maiden flight from Augsburg. Testing of successive prototypes proceeded in the ensuing months, with various Procurement Plans throughout 1937 and 1938 calling for delivery of *Bf 110* 'B' and 'C' variants outfitted with differing engines (*Jumo 210* and *DB 601*), and in ever changing quantities. *Bf 110* production had, in November 1936, already been identified as taking place not only at *Messerschmitt's* main plant in Augsburg (the *Bayerische Flugzeugwerke*) but also at the *Gotha* factory.

While the prototypes flew without armament, by May 1939 development of firepower for the *Bf 110* had ultimately settled on two MG FF cannon and four MG 17s in the nose, and a single, rearward-firing MG 15 for the *Bordfunker*. Two months later, a *Bf 110 B-1* fitted with a single 30 mm MG 101 cannon in place of the two MG FF was displayed at Rechlin to Hitler ('MG' was the designation given to all 'cannon'-sized, i.e. 20 mm or higher calibre, weapons up to the end of 1940 at least, in spite of most publications up to now incorrectly identifying the 30 mm weapon as 'MK', which designation only came at a later date). This concept would evolve into the *Bf 110 C-6* variant, albeit produced in very limited numbers.

Only a small number of *Bf 110 A*s were built, resulting out of an order for nine. Seven that were produced were used as test beds for the further development of the type. The other two were in fact delivered as 'B's.

## Into Service

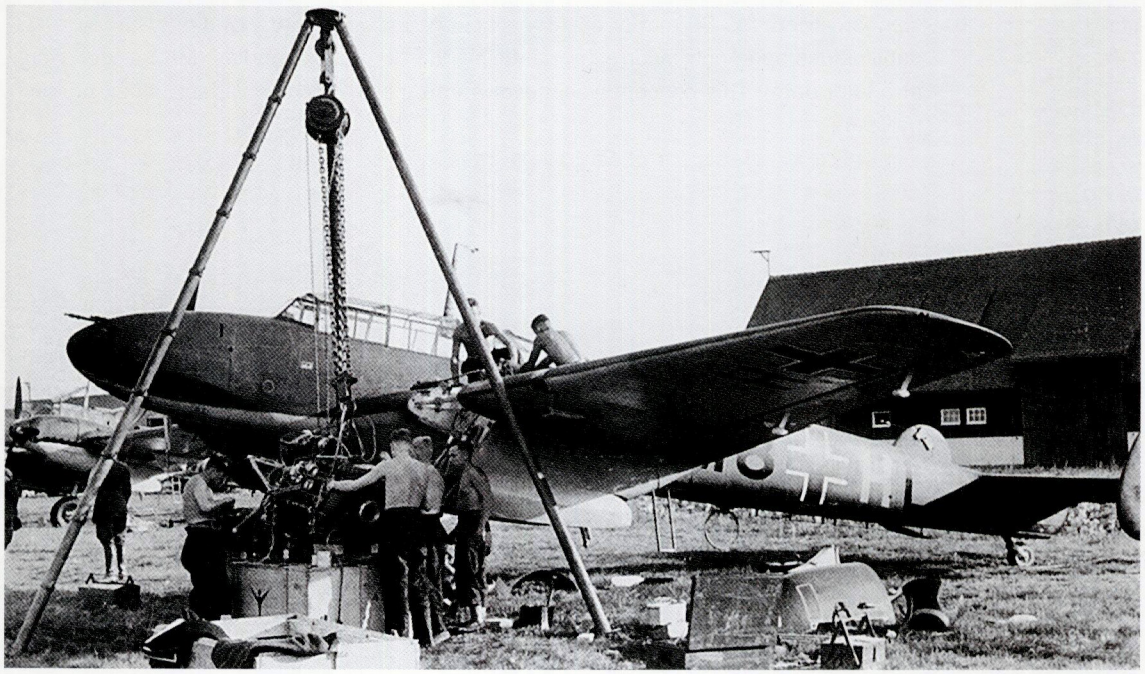
The *Jumo* 210 G-engined *Bf 110 B-1* entered limited production from April 1938 onwards. Including the two 'A's built as 'B's, the total production of B series *Bf 110s* was 88. Production continued until October 1939, split between the *Messerschmitt* and *Gotha* works. As well as being issued to training units, the *Bf 110 B-1* also found its way to front line units *Zerstörergeschwader 26 (ZG 26)* and *I.(Zerstörer) Lehrgeschwader 1 [I.(Z)/LG 1]*. By the summer of 1939 the 'B' variant was being withdrawn from the front line and passed to training units, its place taken by the 'C' variant equipped with *DB 601* engines with a redesigned lower engine cowling. The large radiators, a prominent feature of 'B' aircraft, were redesigned and relocated on the lower wing, resulting in a more refined cowling. The first production C series aircraft, the C-1, can be identified by the twin aerial leads from the mast situated on the cockpit roof being attached to both fins of the aircraft. From the C-2 series onwards there would only be a single lead to the starboard fin. The C-4 would appear similar to the C-2 externally, and the

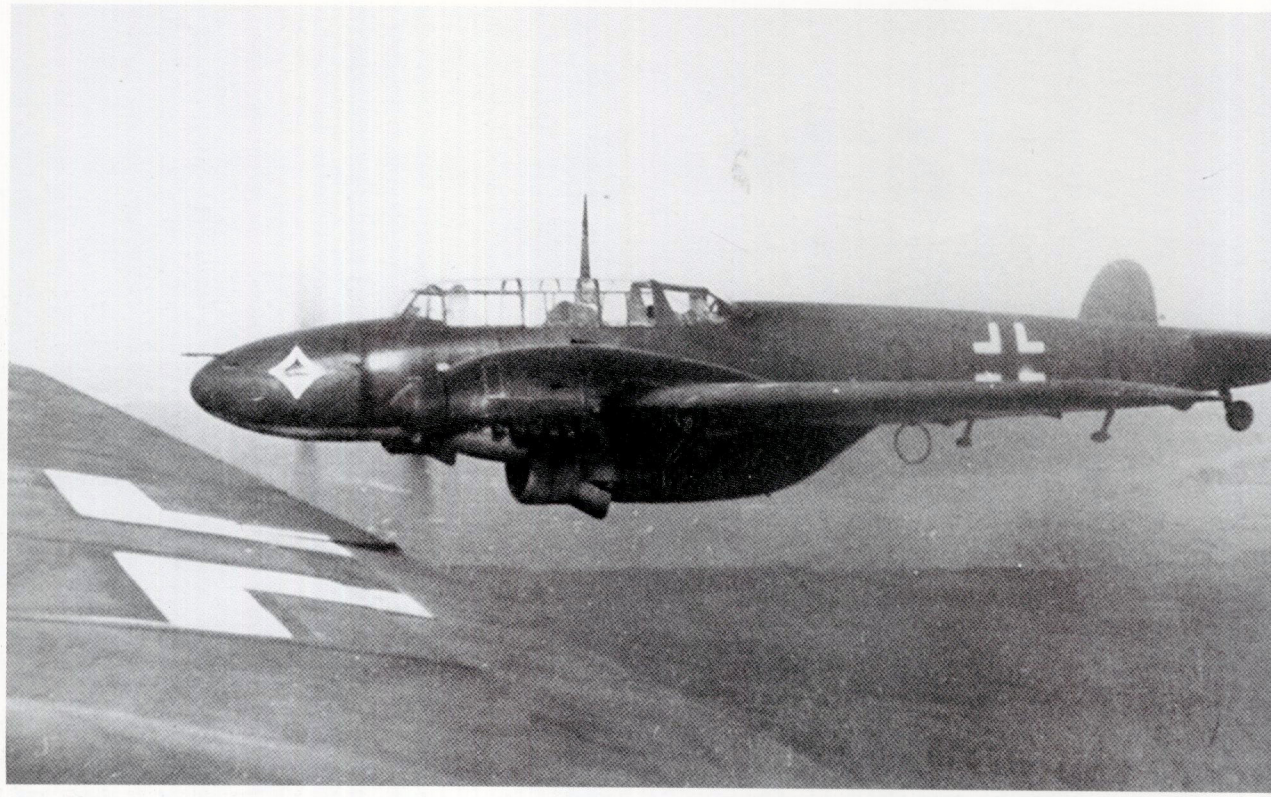
*LEFT*: Covers are still on the front canopies and noses of these Bf 110 'B' variants of ZG 26. Of note is the early style camouflage, but the whole of the swastika on the fin was somewhat uncommon on 'B' series aircraft; it was more commonly seen across both fin and rudder.

reconnaissance version, the C-5, would also be difficult to identify from the C-2 and C-4, since the modification involved the internal fitment of a camera. The fairing enclosing the 30 mm cannon beneath the fuselage clearly identified the C-6 version. The 'D' series' most distinguishing feature was the extended rear fuselage that housed a dinghy and emergency equipment for life-saving purposes over water, with the '*Dackelbauch*' fuel tank or bomb racks under the fuselage being a further identifying feature of the type. The C-7 was a factory conversion of the earlier C sub-variants (but not the C-6) that was retro-fitted with bomb racks, and only a few reached units in 1940. The main distinguishing feature of the E variant, which began to see operational service with some units towards the end of 1940, was the small rectangular air inlet on the nose.

The first unit to be equipped with the 'C' variant was *I.(Z)/LG 1*. Having missed combat in the Spanish Civil War, the *Bf 110*'s first experience of combat conditions occurred at the outbreak of the Second World War over Poland. Less than 100 serviceable machines were available on 1 September 1939. *I.(Z)/LG 1*, *I.Gruppe, Zerstörergeschwader 1 (I./ZG 1)* and *I. Gruppe, Zerstörergeschwader 76 (I./ZG 76)* all saw action, having been outfitted with the *Bf 110*. The three *Zerstörer* units were distributed across the whole of the front.

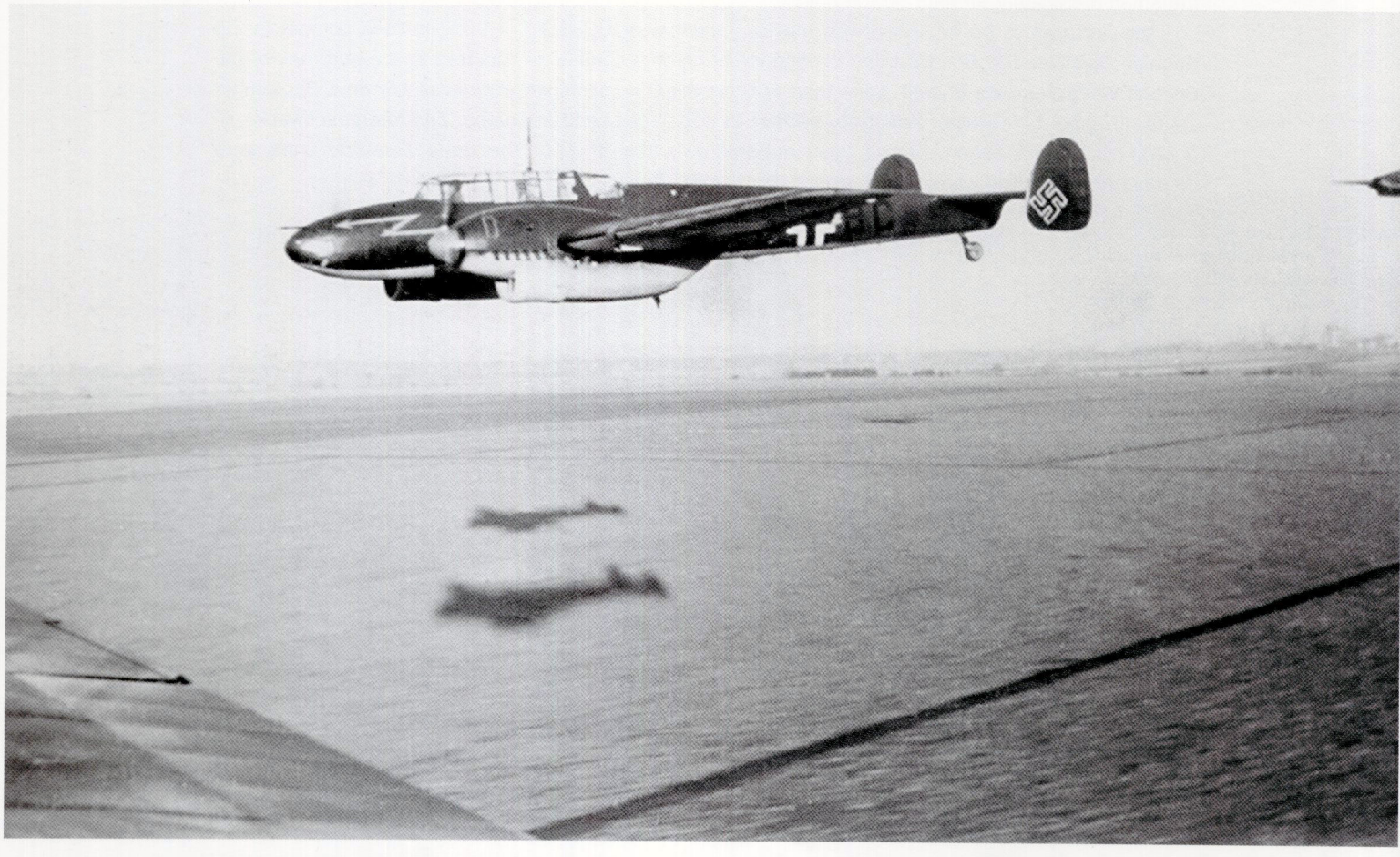
*RIGHT*: This 'B' shows all the hallmarks of the first variant to go to front line units. M8+HL of 3./ZG 76 has the early narrow style of fuselage cross. The narrow underwing cross is placed near the wing tip, with the individual aircraft letter inboard of it. Later, the enlarged underwing cross would be placed far closer to the radiator, changing places with the letter. Note the starboard fin/rudder locks in place, as well as the twin antennae from the cockpit aerial. This photograph also shows to good effect the lifting equipment used to remove the port engine. In the background a 'C' variant can be seen.



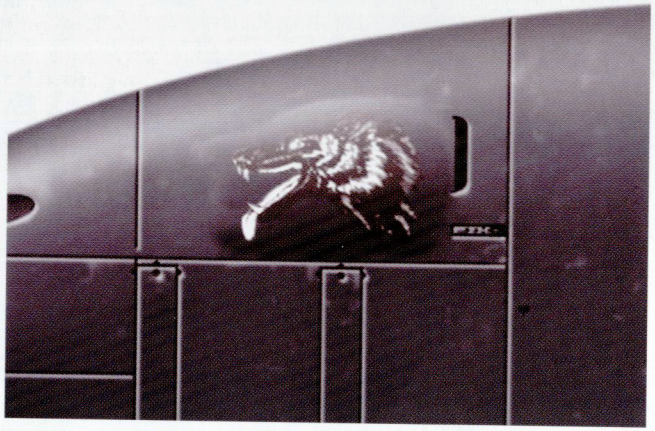


*RIGHT*: An excellent in-flight view of a Bf 110 B-1 of 5./ZG 26, with the 'Ace of Spades' Staffel emblem prominent on the forward fuselage.

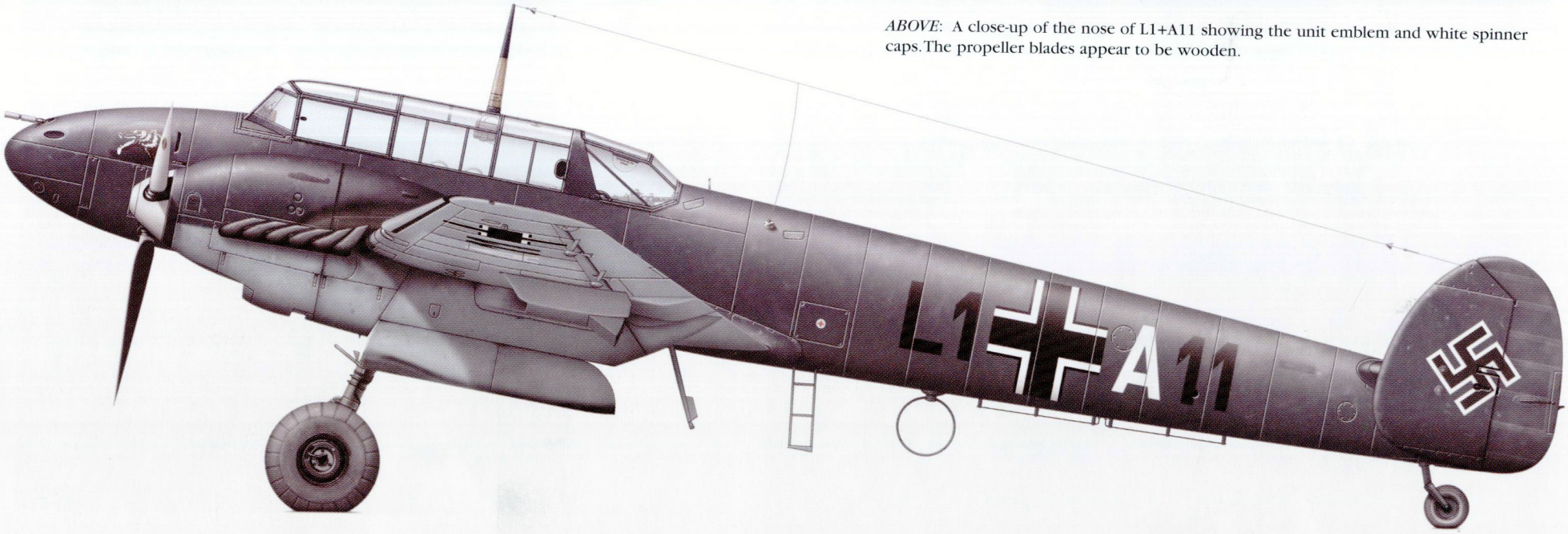
*BELOW*: 3U+BC of the Gruppenadjutant of II. Gruppe, Zerstörergeschwader 26, Wilhelm Schaefer. Note the single yellow lightning flash on the nose. The aircraft of the Gruppenkommander, Friedrich Vollbracht, carried a single red lightning flash. When they both moved to Geschwaderstab positions with ZG 2, they continued the use of the single lightning flash on both of their aircraft. The individual aircraft letter 'B' in the fuselage code is in the Gruppenstab colour of green. Spinners are in the same colour. Note the swastika is carried on the fin only. There is no evidence of a Werknummer on either the fuselage or fin.



*ABOVE AND RIGHT*: This Bf 110 C-1, L1+A11, of 1.(schwere Jagd)/LG 1 carries the earliest style of unit markings on the fuselage. Note the two antennae coming from the cockpit aerial mast, the Gruppe emblem on the nose and the thin underwing cross placed near the wingtip. This 'C' also has the rounded wingtips common to the 'B' variant which would change to 'squared-off' wingtips as the 'C' variant developed.



*ABOVE*: A close-up of the nose of L1+A11 showing the unit emblem and white spinner caps. The propeller blades appear to be wooden.




**Messerschmitt Bf 110 C-1 of 1.(schwere Jagd)/LG 1**

**Carrying the second style of fuselage code (initially only numbers had been carried on the Bf 110 B-1s of the unit), L1+A11 carries the standard two-tone 70/71 upper surface camouflage down the sides of the fuselage. The small wolf's head emblem of the unit is carried on the nose. White spinners and letter 'A' are in the correct 1. Staffel colour. The early radio equipment is fitted, requiring two leads from the cockpit mast. Note the silhouette of a Bf 110 painted on the engine cowling, a still unexplained practice seen on early Bf 110s, and at least one propeller blade appearing to be in bare metal.**

*THIS PAGE*: A line-up Bf 110s of I.(schwere Jagd)/LG 1 sporting the early fuselage codes at Barth in the summer of 1939. Protective covers on the cockpits, the early style thin fuselage cross and the swastika across both fin and rudder can be seen.

## The Polish Campaign

On 1 September 1939 Germany attacked Poland across a broad front, but the prevailing bad weather conditions prevented any large scale initial deployment of *Zerstörer* units at the outbreak of the war. *2./ZG 76* under *Oberleutnant (Oblt.)* Wolfgang Falck was airborne early in the morning but encountered no Polish opposition. In the afternoon, elements of *I./ZG 76* were locked in combat with Polish fighters and made their first claims of the war, but also suffered their first losses. An ominous sign, perhaps, that in fighter-versus-fighter combat the *Messerschmitt 110* would ultimately suffer unacceptable losses. The first day also saw *I./ZG 1* in action, but it suffered a major loss on the following day when *Hauptmann (Hptm.)* von Müllenheim, *Staffelkapitän* of *3. Staffel* was killed in action against the nimble *PZL P.11* fighters. His place at the head of the *Staffel* was taken by *Oblt.* Walter Ehle, a future night fighter ace. On the first day *I.(Z)/LG 1* provided escort for *Heinkel He 111* bombers, and their role could be considered less than successful once Polish fighters intercepted. Six *Heinkels* were shot down, with two Polish fighters being claimed by the *Messerschmitt 110* pilots. Matters improved in the afternoon on a further bomber escort mission when *I.(Z)/LG 1* lodged claims for five enemy fighters. In the main, the Polish fighters were slower, and more lightly armed, but on occasions proved to be nimble and determined opponents.

*ABOVE*: The grave of Uffz. Walter Rahlfs, Bordfunker of the Staffelkapitän of 13. Staffel, Oblt. Helmut Müller. Rahlfs was hit during an attack by a Polish fighter, and was the first member of the unit to be killed in action.

In the days following, the *Bf 110*s were regularly in action, with varying degrees of success. *I./ZG 1* filed relatively few claims while *I.(Z)/LG 1* claimed 30 victories. As the Polish campaign ground to its inevitable conclusion with German forces advancing inexorably through Poland, the role of the *Zerstörer* units changed. From bomber escort, their duties moved to that of ground support. Seeking out and attacking elements of Polish ground forces in their headlong retreat, this type of action was not universally liked by the *Bf 110* pilots, who at that time saw their task as air-to-air combat and protection of their flying comrades in other units rather than in ground-attack missions.

*ABOVE*: Uffz. Friedrich Lindemann was shot down by Polish fighters on 3 September 1939. Evading capture, he and his Bordfunker, Uffz. Kurt Radeck, regained German lines and returned to their unit.

Among the losses suffered during the Polish campaign was *Major* Karl Hammes, the 43 year-old *Staffelkapitän* of *1./ZG 1*. Hammes had had a somewhat chequered life. Born in March 1896, he enlisted at the outbreak of the First World War and served initially as an artillery officer. Obtaining a transfer to the air force, he flew initially with a reconnaissance unit before transferring to *Jasta 35*. With that unit he claimed four aerial victories before being badly wounded in combat on 9 September 1917. By this time he had attained the rank of *Oblt.* and been awarded the Iron Cross, First Class. His wounds were so severe that he undertook no further front line flying before the end of the war. His life then took a completely new course, as he embarked upon a career as an opera singer. He reached the top of that profession as a baritone, appearing at the Kroll Opera House in Berlin and the State Opera in Vienna among other top venues. The lure of the *Luftwaffe* proved too much, however, and he enlisted again in June 1937. Promotion to *Hptm.* followed in March 1938. By the outbreak of war in September 1939 he held the rank of *Major* and led *1./ZG 1*, part of *I. Gruppe* under the overall control of *Gruppenkommandeur, Major* Joachim-Friedrich Huth, another First World War veteran. So it was that while leading *1. Staffel* on the morning of 6 September on an escort mission for *Stukas,* the German fighters came under attack from Polish P.11c fighters. *Major* Hammes' *Bf 110 C-1*, coded 2N+IH, received hits and was seen to go down in a shallow glide. Although effecting a relatively good belly-landing, *Major* Hammes died of his wounds. His *Bordfunker, Oberfeldwebel (Ofw.)* Walter Steffen, was wounded and taken into captivity, returning to Germany when the Polish campaign was concluded. Thus ended the colourful life of *Major* Karl Hammes, opera singer and fighter pilot. His place as *Staffelkapitän* of *1./ZG 1* was taken by *Oblt.* Martin Lutz, who would feature prominently during the Battle of Britain with *Erprobungsgruppe 210 (Erpr. Gr. 210)*.

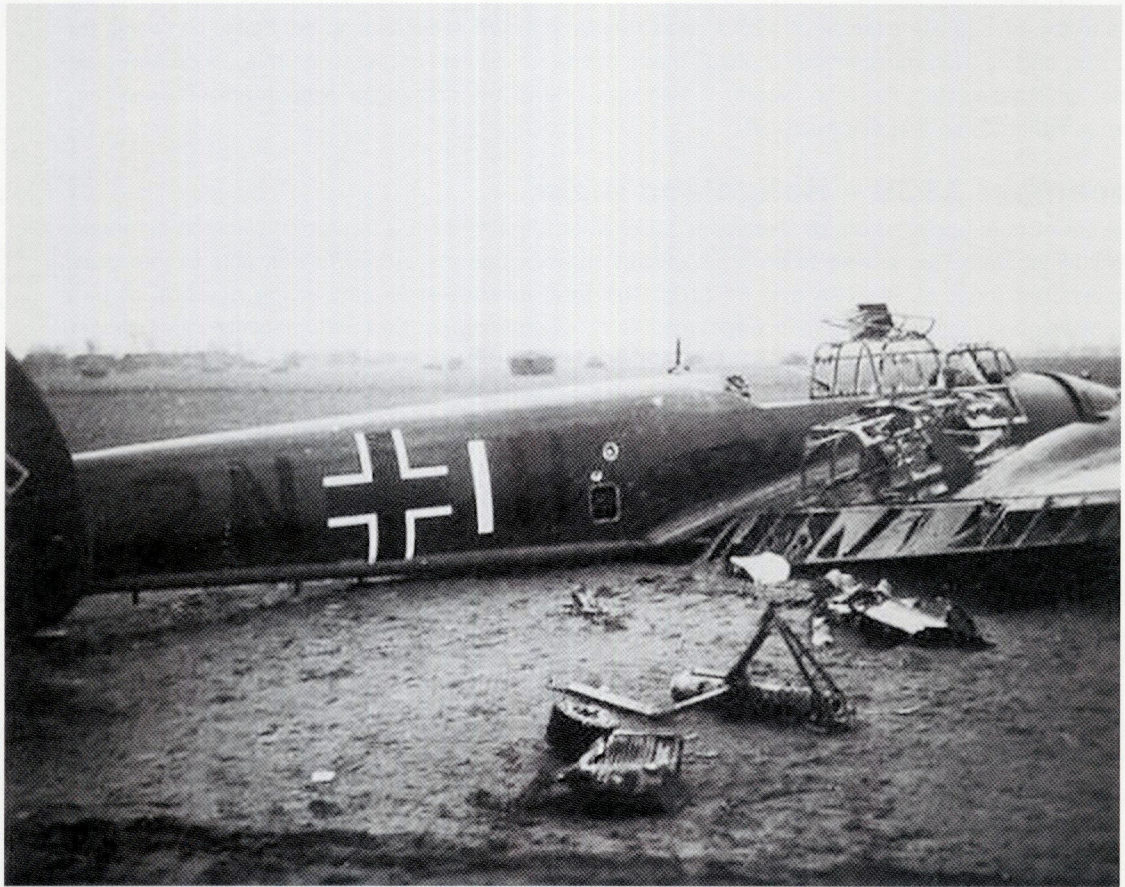
*LEFT*: The pilot of this Bf 110 C-1 has made a relatively good belly-landing, although it appears that the aircraft finally came to rest with the aid of the tree. This aircraft carries the early style fuselage cross with the thin white area and the fully enclosed Bordfunker's rear canopy. The cockpit canopy antenna clearly has two aerial leads hanging from it, denoting the early radio system fitted to 'B' and 'C-1' series Bf 110 aircraft. The spinner tips have a single ring around them, which, like the individual aircraft letter 'D', appear to be white.

## Phoney War

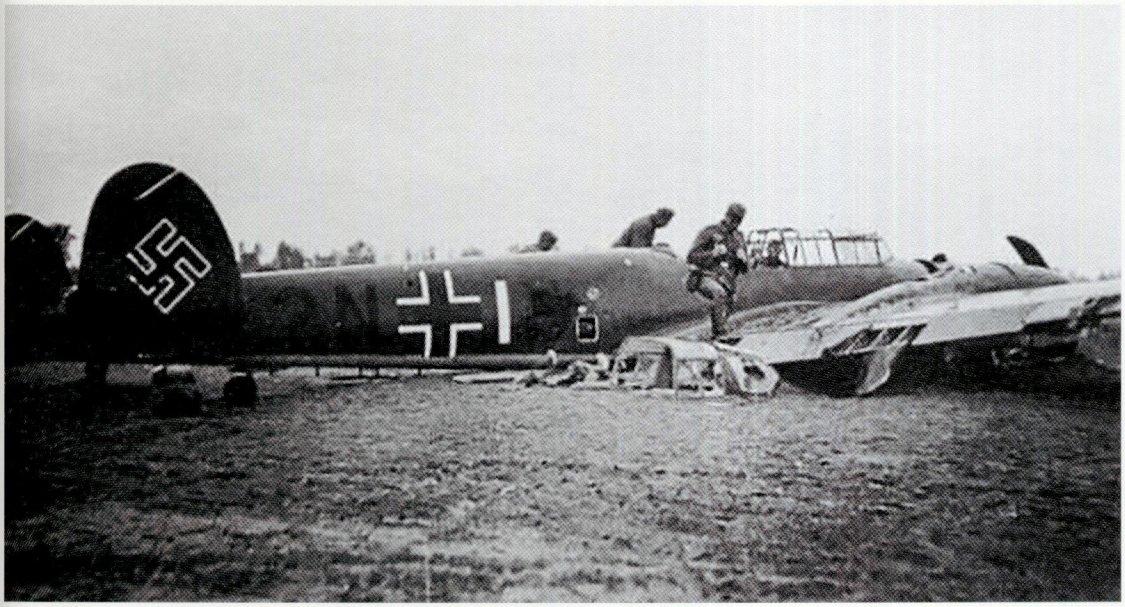
Following the cessation of hostilities against Poland, matters settled into what was termed the 'Phoney War' or *'Drôle de Guerre'*. It appeared to be more a case of all sides taking stock and not quite knowing what to do next. In this period, the opportunity was taken to convert those *Bf 109*-equipped *Zerstörer* units to the *Bf 110*. For example, *II./ZG 1* converted from the *Bf 109*s used in the Polish campaign to *Bf 110*s, and *Zerstörergeschwader 2 (ZG 2)* made the same conversion. Although this period saw one of the severest winters for many years, it also saw one of the first major encounters between the German fighter force and Allied aircraft.

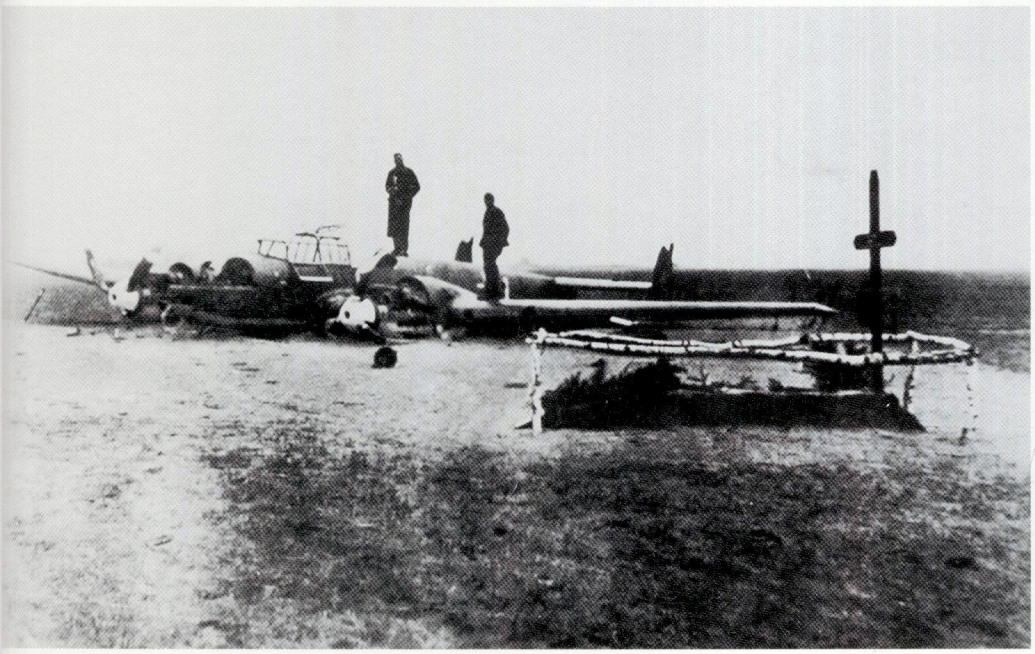
## December 1939 – Heligoland Bight

An event of note occurred on 18 December 1939 when the RAF sent a force of Wellington bombers to Wilhelmshafen. This proved to be an ill-advised move, since the *Luftwaffe* was able to intercept with a mixed force of *Bf 109*s and *Bf 110*s. The total number of aircraft at the disposal of the *Geschwaderkommodore* of *Jagdgeschwader 1 (JG 1)*, *Oberstleutnant* Carl Schumacher, under whose overall command they came, amounted to between 80 and 100 fighters. *I/ZG 76*, under *Hptm.* Günther Reinecke, was the sole twin-engined unit assigned to Schumacher. However, when the bombers were intercepted, the *Zerstörer* engaged in a rather piecemeal manner. The *Staffelkapitän* of *2./ZG 76*, Wolfgang Falck, along with his wingman, *Unteroffizier. (Uffz.)* Heinz Fresia, was already airborne, and they were the first *Bf 110* crews to engage the Wellingtons. After their attack they lodged claims for two Wellingtons each, but Falck's aircraft was the victim of defending fire and he had to crash-land on Wangerooge. Other aircraft of *I./ZG 76* intercepted at intervals, and the final reckoning resulted in claims for shot down Wellingtons amounting to 38, of which *I./ZG 76* claimed 15. Many of these were not allowed to stand, but the *Zerstörer* crews could lay claim to their share of victories in this action. Post-war information from official RAF sources admitted the loss of 12 bombers, with a further three returning to Britain damaged. One interesting matter emerged from this mission by the Wellingtons. *Luftwaffe* examination of one of the downed RAF bombers concluded that no bombs had been carried, which perplexed intelligence officers. They were later staggered to learn that the mission was a 'navigation flight' according to the information provided by some surviving RAF aircrew. Aircraft could be replaced, but to lose so many valuable aircrew seemed a criminal waste of resources at the time.



*THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE*: Five views of Bf 110 C-1, 2N+IH, which was shot down in combat on 6 September 1939. The pilot, Major Karl Hammes, the 43 year-old Staffelkapitän of 1. Staffel died as a result of wounds suffered. His Bordfunker, Obfw. Walter Steffen, was taken into captivity, but later released when hostilities ended. Note that the 'I' in the fuselage code is white with no outline, and the swastika overlaps both fin and rudder. The early style fuselage cross with a thin white outline can be clearly seen. The propeller spinner is in the Staffel colour of white. Hammes was buried beside his crashed aircraft.





*BELOW*: The grave of Major Karl Hammes. The inscription on the cross translates as: 'Major of the Luftwaffe Hammes fell in combat for Führer and Greater Germany on 6.9.39.'

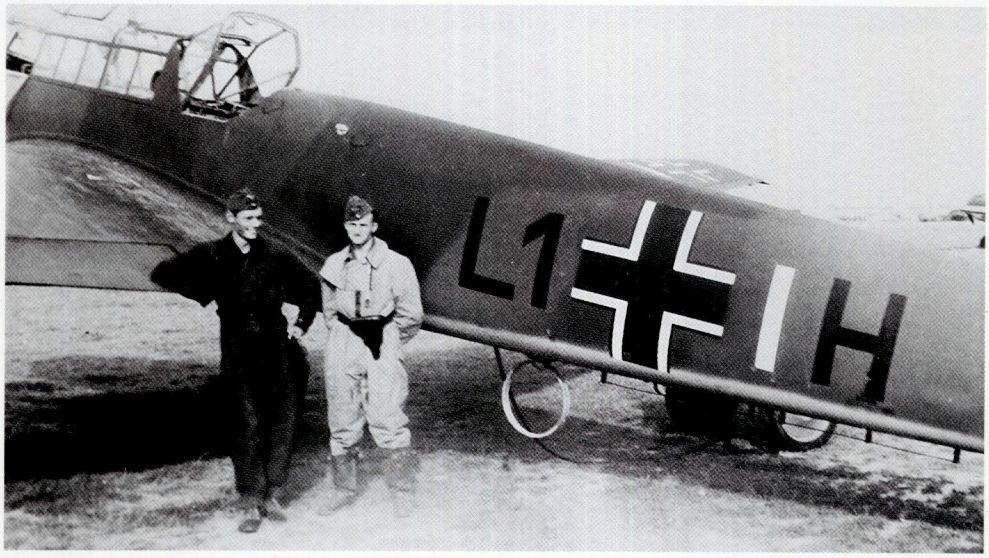
*THIS PAGE*:
Two aerial views of Bf 110s of 2./ZG 76 on an unknown airfield in the winter of 1939/40.

*LEFT*: The work of ground personnel did not cease with the onset of winter. Here servicing is being carried out on both engines of a C-1 variant.

*BELOW*: This C-2 in a wintry scene still carries the Stammkennzeichen on the undersides of the wings. The early style solid upper surface camouflage can be clearly seen and the swastika is carried on the fin only.

*THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE*: This series of photographs shows work being carried out on Bf 110 C-1, L1+DH, of 13.(Z)/LG 1. Particular points of interest are the two antennae leading from the cockpit mast, the aerial attachment point on the starboard fuselage side, the cutaway in the Bordfunker's central rear canopy so that it can be fully closed with the machine gun in the firing position, the individual aircraft letter 'D' in white with no outline, and the white areas of the fuselage cross apparently having no black outer border.

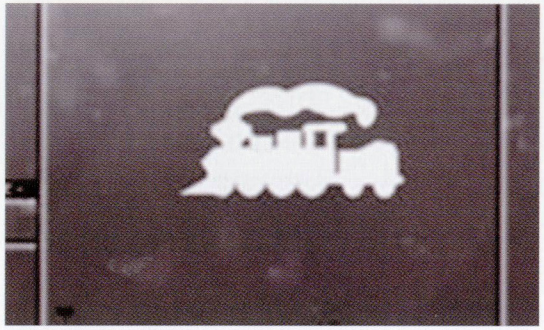
*LEFT*: A line up of Bf 110 C-1s of I./ZG 26 photographed in the winter of 1939/40. Note the oversized under-wing cross on the nearest aircraft on the left.

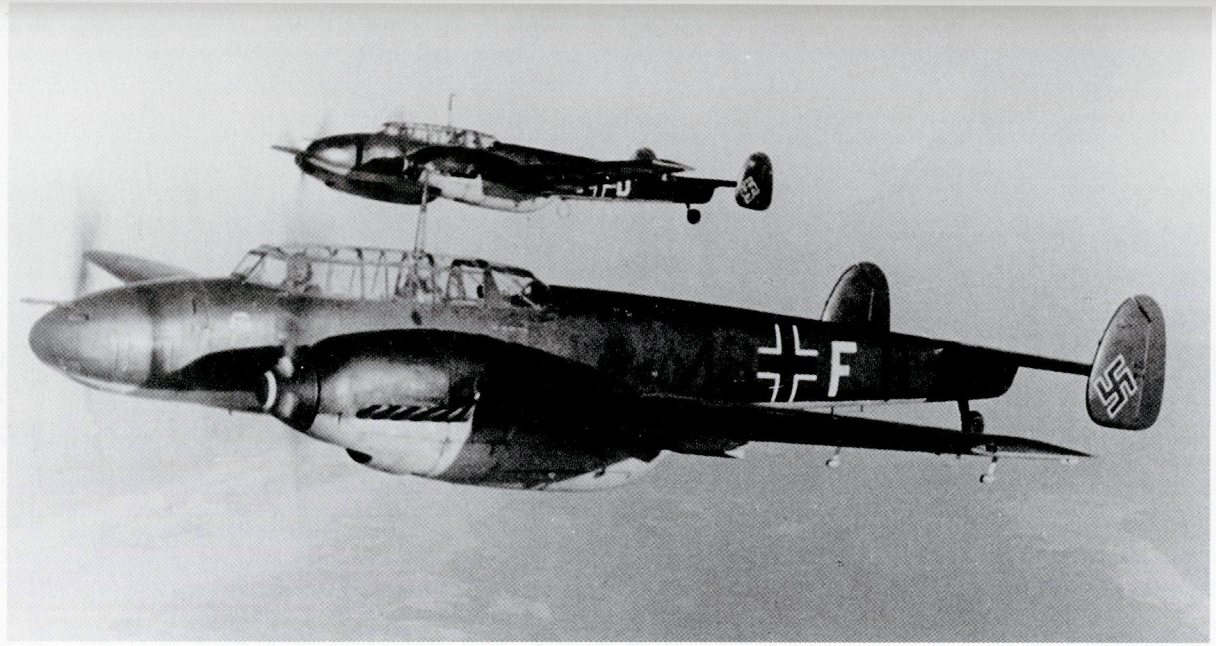


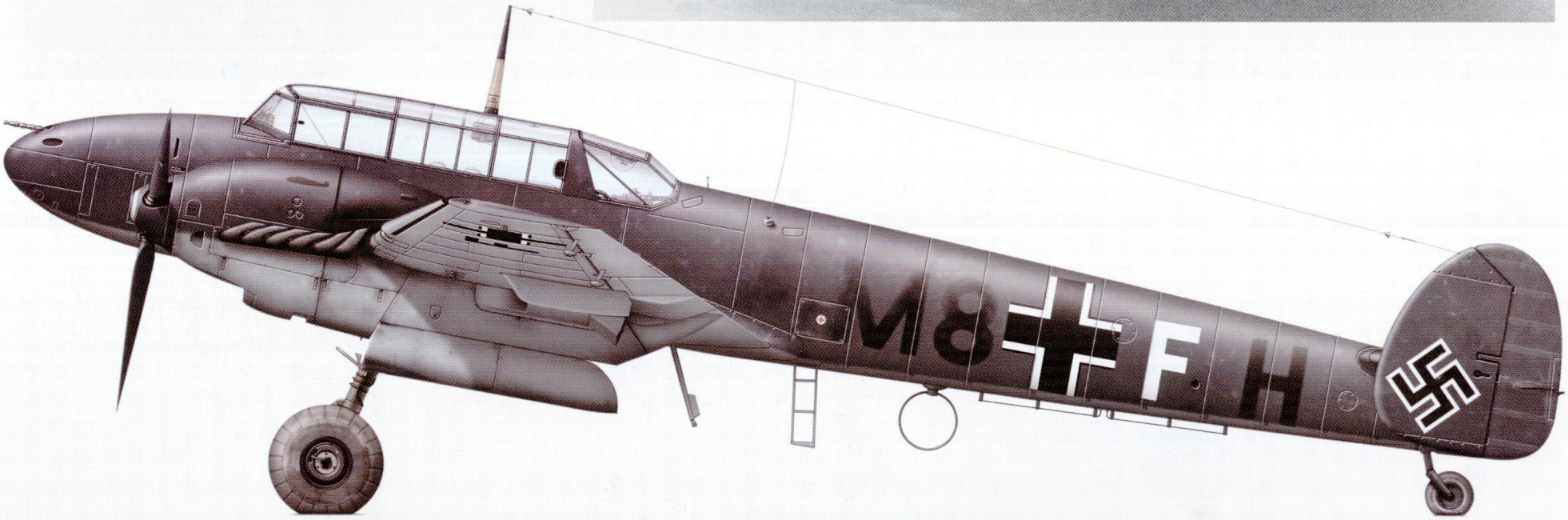

*LEFT*: L1+IH, a Bf 110 C-1 of 13.(Z)/LG 1 displays the aerial attachment point on the port side of its fuselage. Note the fully enclosed type of rear central panel for the Bordfunker.

*RIGHT*: Fw. Herbert Schob poses in the cockpit of his Bf 110 C-1 with his Bordfunker, Ogefr. Willi Landrock. Schob survived the war; Landrock was killed on a training flight on 4 January 1940 when two Bf 110s collided.

*RIGHT*: An in-flight view of aircraft M8+FH and M8+DH, two Bf 110 C-1s of 1./ZG 76. Both aircraft carry the early style fuselage cross. The spinners have a small white ring on them in the Staffel colour of white.
'F' has a small locomotive painted beneath the windscreen, and 'D' appears to have victory bars above the swastika.





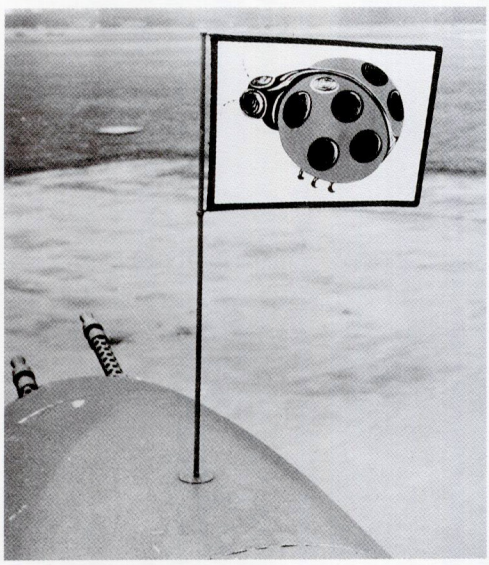



**Messerschmitt Bf 110 C-1 of 1./ZG 76**

**M8+FH carries the early style solid fuselage camouflage, and the early style fuselage cross. The small white rings on the spinners are in the Staffel colour of white. Although an early 'C' variant, the swastika is in the later position of being applied to the fin only. 'F' has a small locomotive painted beneath the windscreen.**

## The Scandinavian Campaign – April 1940

The first major campaign in 1940 came about through the political machinations of the opposing countries, with Scandinavia as the focal point. This northern part of Europe had taken on a strategic importance vital for the future prosecution of the war, for the deep water harbours it afforded to a major naval force, and the airfields that would allow a vital extension of any airborne undertaking. Among the many *Luftwaffe* units slated to take part in the offensive were *I./ZG 1* (now with *Hptm.* Wolfgang Falck as *Gruppenkommandeur*) and *I./ZG 76* under *Hptm.* Günther Reinecke.

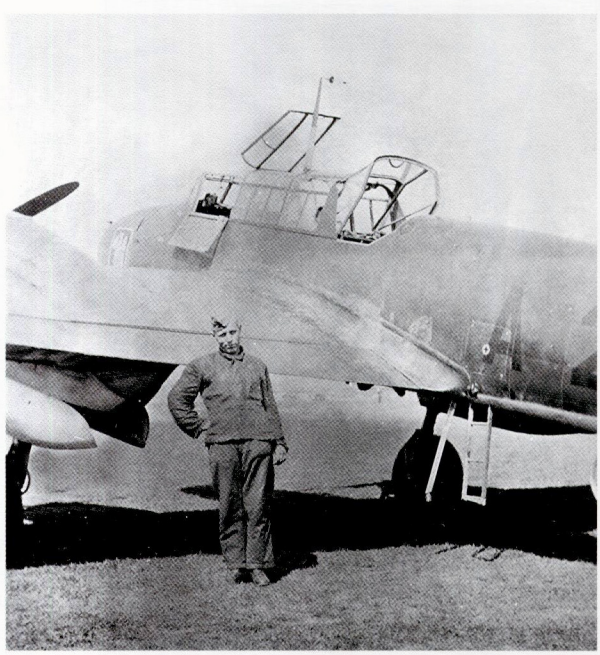


*ABOVE*: An unusual temporary placement of the emblem of 2./ZG 76 on one if the unit's Bf 110s. This is believed to be the aircraft of the one-time Staffelkapitän, Wolfgang Falck.

Operations commenced on the morning of 9 April with German ground forces crossing the border and marching into Denmark. *I./ZG 1*'s role was to provide air cover for the paratroop landings at Ålborg, but such was the ease of the operation that no opposition was encountered in the air and the unit was able to land on Ålborg airfield. Commissioning *Oblt.* Victor Mölders to find accommodation for his *1. Staffel* in Ålborg, *Oblt.* Martin Lutz could justifiably lay claim to the fact that he led the occupation of the town.

*I./ZG 76* had a far more difficult time in its support of the landings in Norway. *1. Staffel*, under *Oblt.* Werner Hansen, was charged with gaining air superiority over Oslo-Fornebu airfield in advance of landings there by *Junkers 52 (Ju 52)* transports. Plans, however, had taken no account of the fact that bad weather could possibly play a part in the day's operations, and immediately things began to go awry when the first wave of transport aircraft turned back due to inclement weather conditions. *1. Staffel*, however, pressed on to its allotted target as to turn back would risk running out of fuel before reaching safety – its only hope now was to be able to land at Oslo-Fornebu. Before reaching there they were attacked by seven Norwegian Air Force Gladiators and suffered the loss of two aircraft to the biplanes. So it was that upon arriving over the airfield the *Staffel*, now reduced to six *Bf 110*s, were greeted with the situation that no landings had yet been made by *Luftwaffe* transport aircraft. When *Ju 52*s came into sight they did not disgorge paratroops, but were instead carrying regular troops. The second wave had arrived, not the first. Heavy ground fire greeted the first attempts of the first *Ju 52*s to land. This appeared enough to dissuade the others to land, and presented Hansen with a dilemma. Ordering *Lt.* Helmut Lent to go in first to land, Hansen and the remaining *Bf 110*s remained overhead and watched as Lent's M8+DH finally came to a halt at the edge of the airfield. The remaining *Bf 110*s of *1. Staffel* then went in and landed safely, with the defending Norwegian ground forces having retreated. An eventful start for *1. Staffel*!

Meanwhile *Oblt.* Gordon Gollob had taken off at the head of his *3./ZG 76* and headed for Stavanger-Sola airfield. Like its counterparts from *1 Staffel*, Gollob's formation encountered bad weather, and Gollob ordered a return to base. However only one Schwarm followed the order, the other carried on to its objective. Tragedy followed as two *Bf 110*s collided and crashed into the sea with both crews being killed. The two remaining *Bf 110*s, flown by *Ofw.* Fleischmann and *Ofw.* Gröning, carried on to Stavanger, witnessed the paratroops alighting from the *Ju 52*s, and then set down there safely.



*LEFT*: An unknown ground mechanic poses in front of a Bf 110 C of I./ZG 52. Note the fully enclosed Bordfunker's central rear canopy. Seen to good effect are the first aid hatch, the ladder for access to the port wing, and the aerial beside it.

Belatedly, British landings were made in northern Norway, when the whole of southern Norway was in German hands and the central part of the country was also rapidly falling into German occupation. Throughout April, *I./ZG 76* continued to encounter RAF bombers and to chalk up

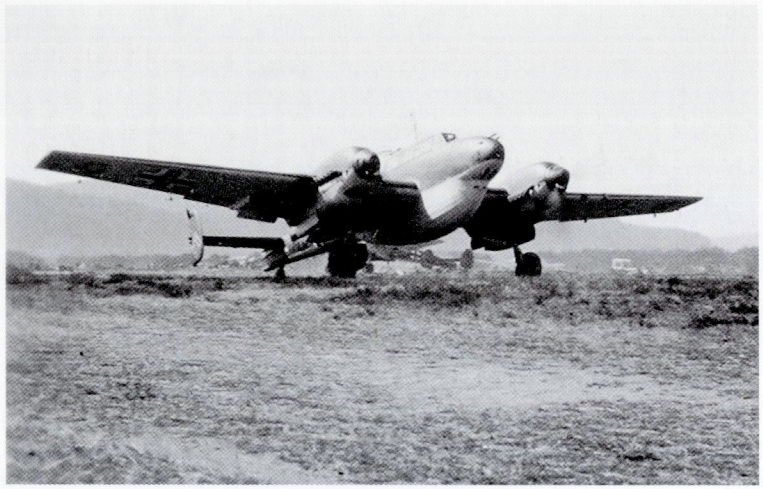
*ABOVE*: An unknown member of I./ZG 52 poses in front of a Bf 110 of the unit, its dragon emblem clearly seen on its nose.

victories. Among those lodging claims were Wolfgang Falck, Helmut Lent, and a later star of night fighting, Helmut Woltersdorf. But along with the successes came the inevitable losses. On 30 April *I./ZG 76* suffered a heavy loss when its *Gruppenkommandeur, Hptm.* Günther Reinecke, was shot down following combat with a Bristol Blenheim. Reinecke's wingman, *Oblt.* Hans Jäger was able to recount how Reinecke's aircraft was hit by return fire and suddenly plunged into the sea. On the same day the *Gruppe* lost two of its 'aces' when *Lt.* Helmut Fahlbusch and *Ofw.* Georg Fleischmann were both killed in action against British bombers. The *Staffelkapitän* of *1. Staffel*, Werner Hansen, took over temporary command of the *Gruppe* until a new *Gruppenkommandeur, Hptm.* Werner Restermeyer, was posted in on 11 May.

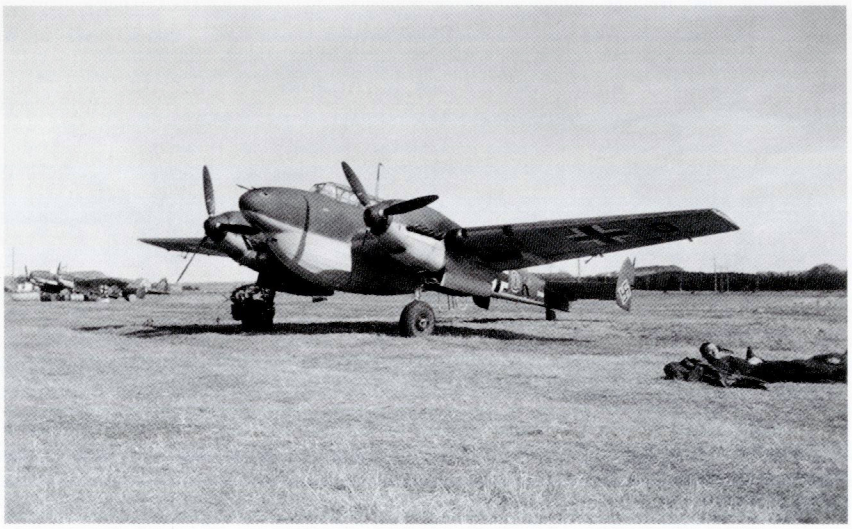
In spite of the loss of Reinecke, missions continued, and with the issue of the *'Dackelbauch' Bf 110 D-0*s to the unit, *I./ZG 76* sent a detachment of crews equipped with this variant to Trondheim under the leadership of *Oblt.* Hans Jäger. Their missions were to fly standing patrols and provide escort to *Luftwaffe* units mounting attacks on British forces in the far north of Norway. The additional fuel tank under the fuselage provided the extended range required of their duties, and flights of up to five hours were recorded. In the second half of May additional RAF units supplemented the British land forces, and the *Dackelbauch* detachment soon tangled with RAF fighters. Regular combat ensued, with the result that the strength of the British force soon dwindled. However, the RAF was still capable of taking on the *Bf 110*s, as Hans Jäger found out on 29 May during combat with Hurricanes of 46 Squadron. With one engine hit, he attempted to regain base, but that was no longer possible once the other engine failed. Making a safe landing, Jäger and his *Bordfunker* were soon taken into captivity by Polish troops before being handed over to the British. Jäger and his *Bordfunker, Uffz.* Helmut Feick, were shipped to England and later on to Canada to spend the rest of the war as prisoners.

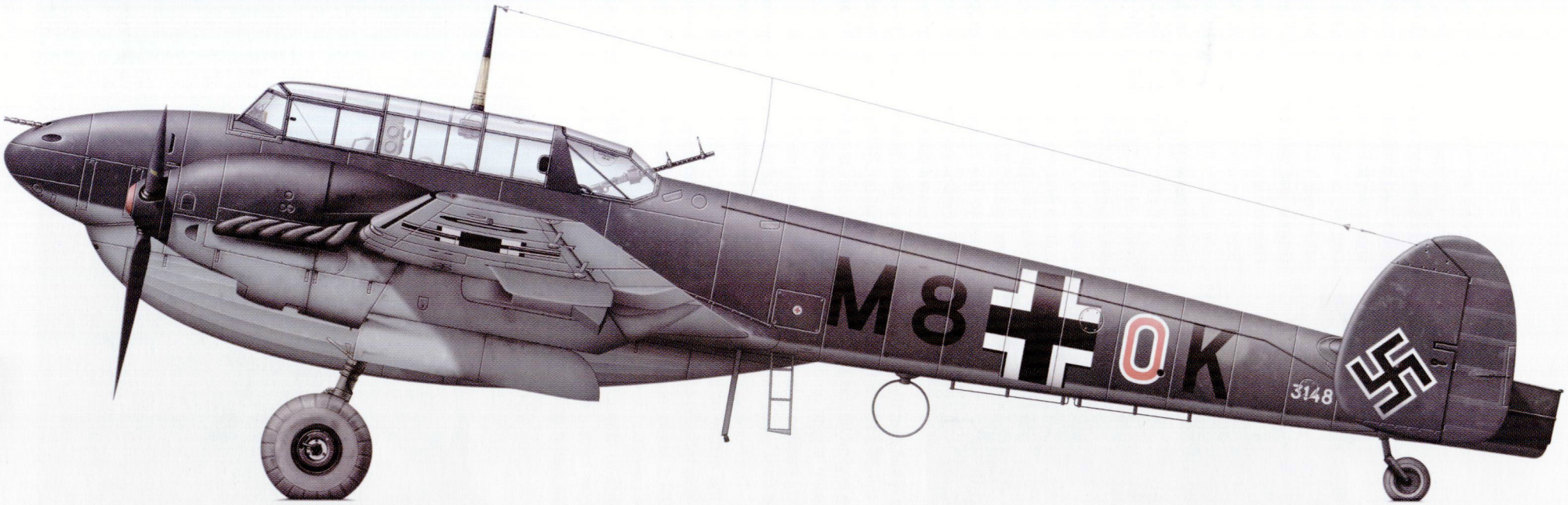
The Norwegian campaign moved to its inevitable conclusion with German forces in the ascendancy, and by the middle of June the conflict was over. *I./ZG 76* remained in Norway, and from there would carry out its only mission of the Battle of Britain. Meanwhile, well before the conclusion of the Norwegian campaign, *I./ZG 1* would return to Germany in time to take part in the next major campaign, the attack on France and The Low Countries. But not before Wolfgang Falck and other pilots of *I./ZG 1* had experimented with twilight flights to attempt to seek out enemy aircraft, which ultimately led to the formation of the *Luftwaffe* night fighter force. For taking the lead in this particular matter, Falck would be charged with working up the first night fighter unit to combat readiness.

*LEFT*: Ground crew pose with an NCO of I./ZG 52. Again, this aircraft carries the style of fuselage cross more commonly seen in 1940. The 'A' and the '2' are spaced further apart than is normally seen for fuselage codes.



*LEFT AND RIGHT*: Two views of M8+OK, W. Nr. 3148, a Bf 110 D-0 'Dackelbauch' of 2./ZG 76 in pristine condition. The letter 'O' is red outlined in white. Note the ribbed construction of the Dackelbauch; the two-tone upper surface camouflage in the forward section of the aircraft, and the extended rear fuselage section, common to all 'D' variants.

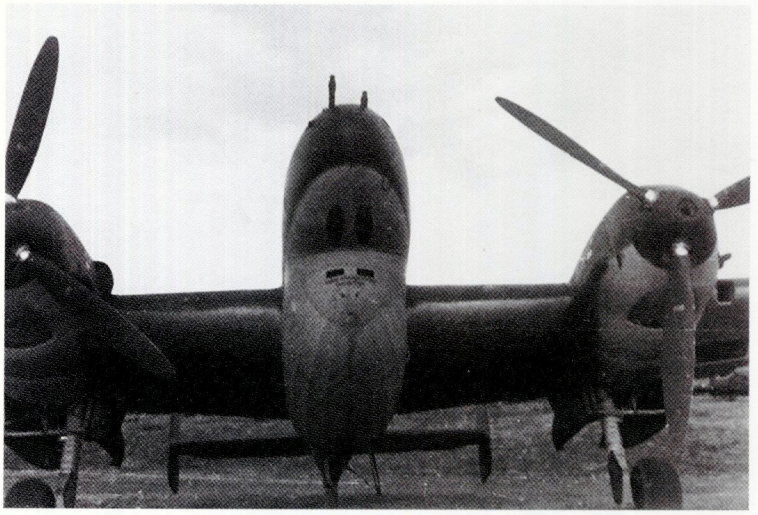





**Messerschmitt 110 D-0 (Dackelbauch) of 2./ZG 76**

**The first 'Dackelbauch' Bf 110s were issued to I./ZG 76 during the Norwegian campaign and M8+OK, W.Nr. 3148, displays the huge central fuselage fairing covering the supplementary fuel tank. The extended rear fuselage housed emergency equipment for the crew if they came down into the sea, common to 'D' series Bf 110s, can be seen, as can the groove down the top of the port side fuselage housing the release cable for the rear fuselage section. This Bf 110 is also camouflaged in solid two-tone greens, 70/71, with the individual aircraft letter 'O' in red.**

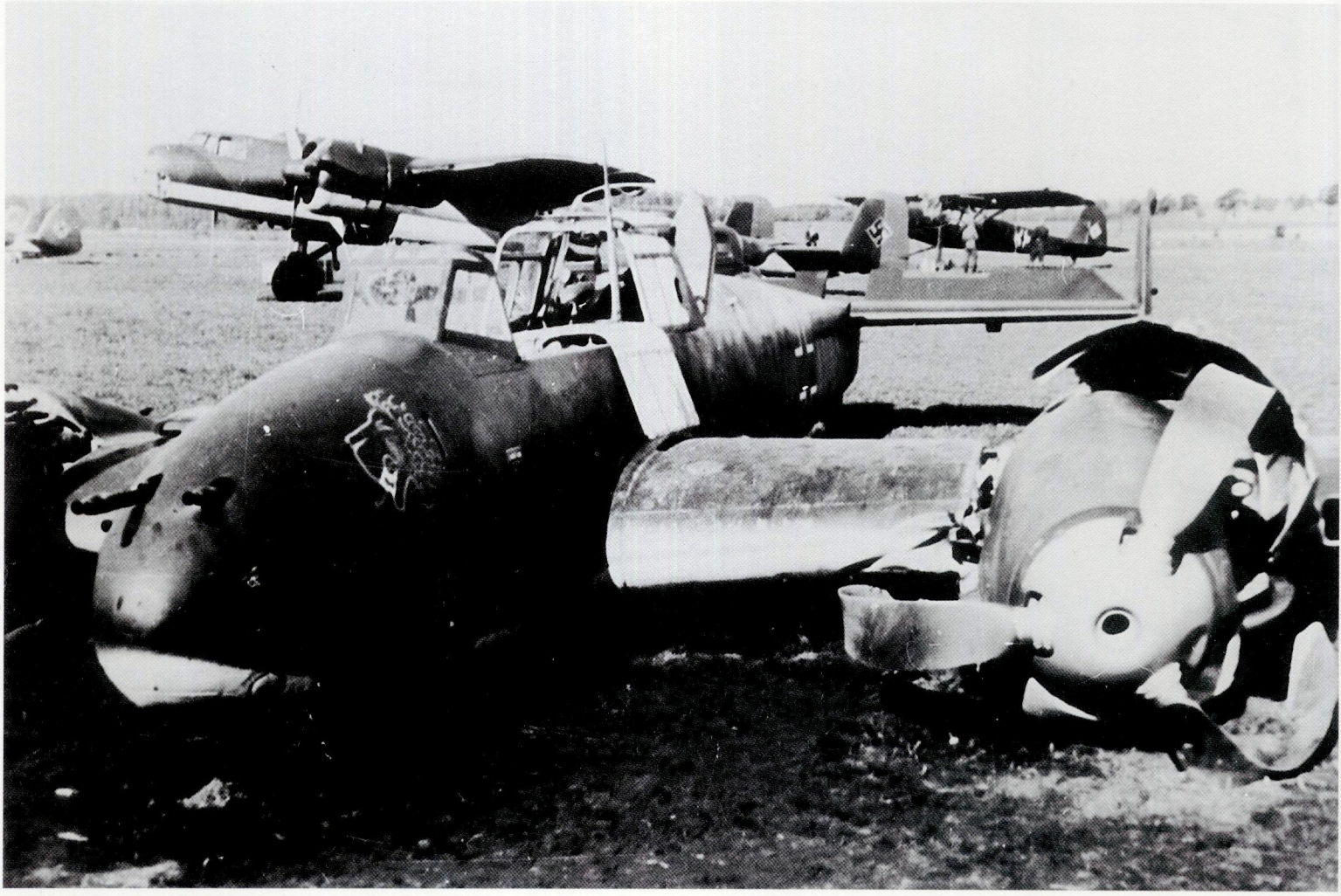
*BELOW*: The front view of a Dackelbauch of I./ZG 76 being re-fuelled. Note the re-fuelling point in the front centre of the Dackelbauch.



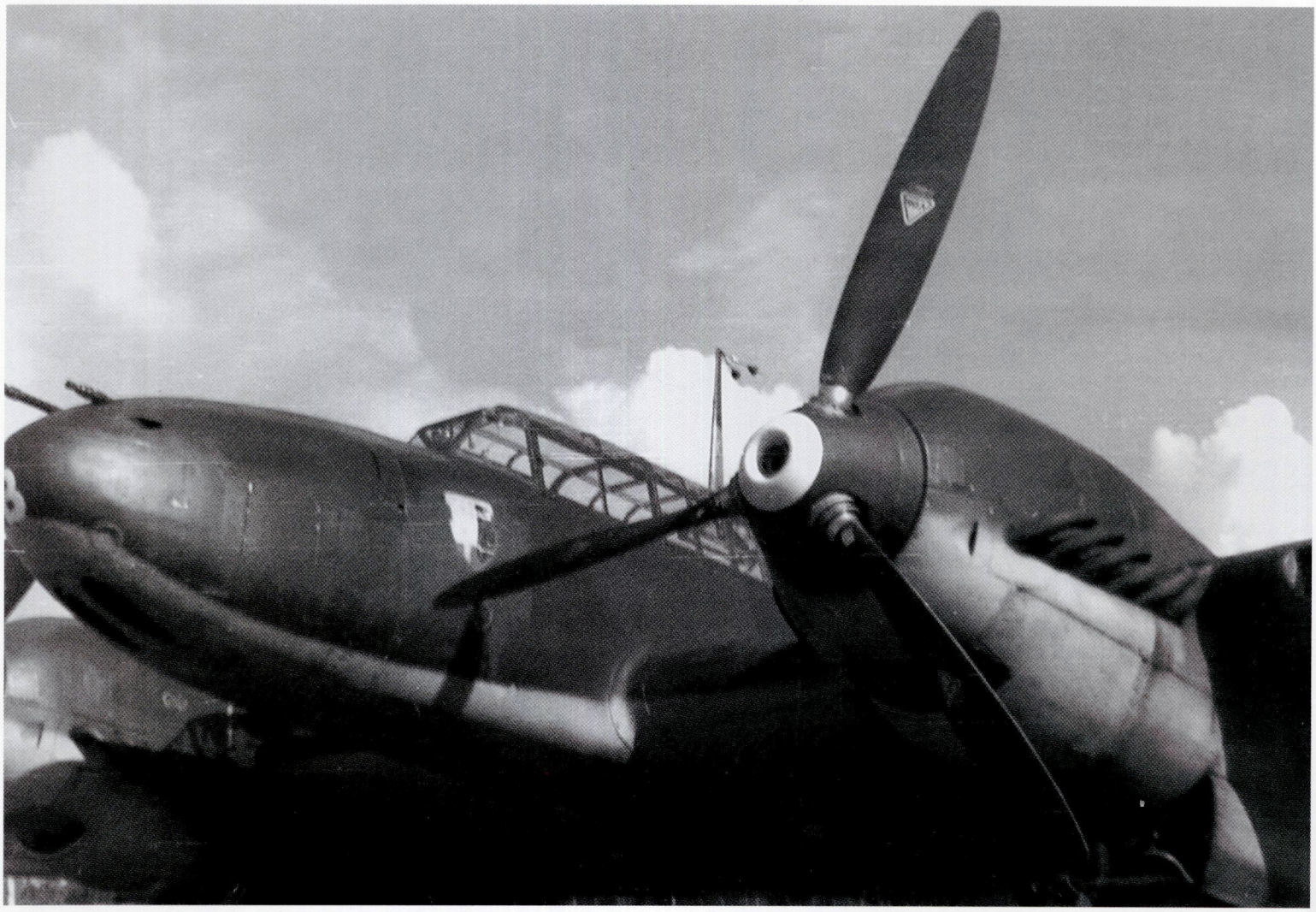
*ABOVE*: A head-on view of the Dackelbauch, showing its bulbous shape to good effect.

*ABOVE*: A line-up of Dackelbauch. The partial factory code 'SF' can be seen. Note that all the Dackelbauch in the photographs carry the solid two-tone upper surface camouflage.

*LEFT*: White spinner tips identify this Dackelbauch as a D-0 of 1./ZG 76.



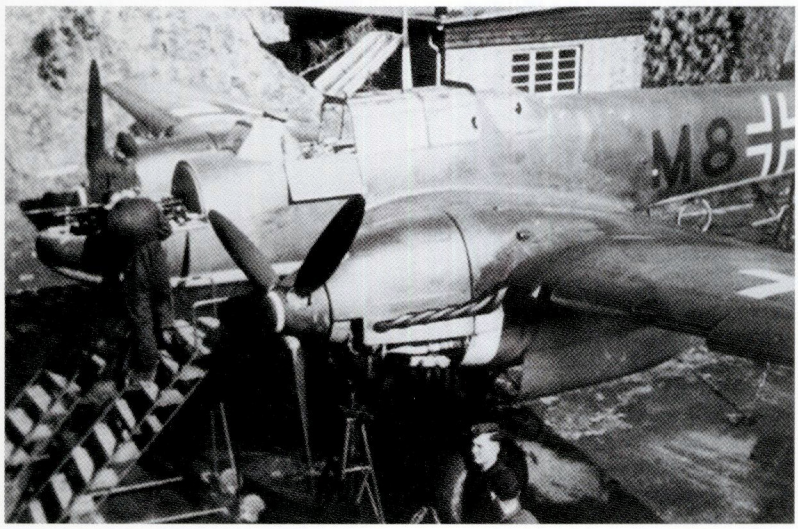
*THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE*: Four views of a crash-landed Bf 110 C-1, 2N+LL, of 3./ZG 1. Note the small size fuselage cross, the lion's head Staffel emblem on the nose and the spinners in the Staffel colour of yellow.



*ABOVE*: A Bf 110 C-1 of I./ZG 76. Note the two antennae extending from the cockpit mast. The spinner tip and the aircraft letter 'B' on the nose would appear to be in yellow, making this a 3. Staffel machine. The emblem is not identified, but appears to be a figure of a bird standing at the top of northern Europe, not dissimilar to the emblem used by JG 1 when it was based in that locality.

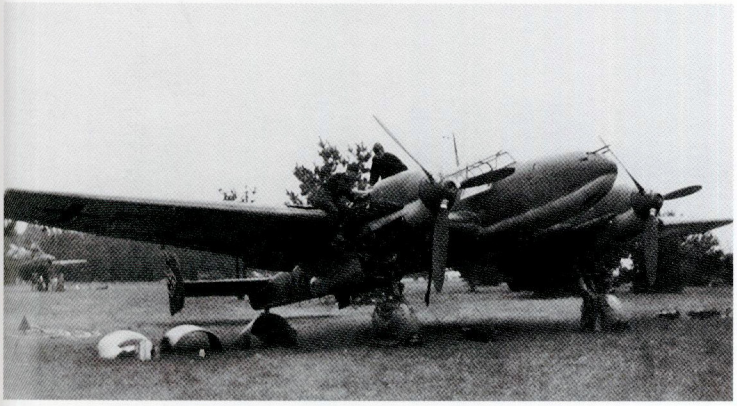
*RIGHT*: A line-up of Bf 110 Cs of 2./ZG 76. The 'C' of M8+CK is red outlined with white. The nearest aircraft is a C-1 variant.

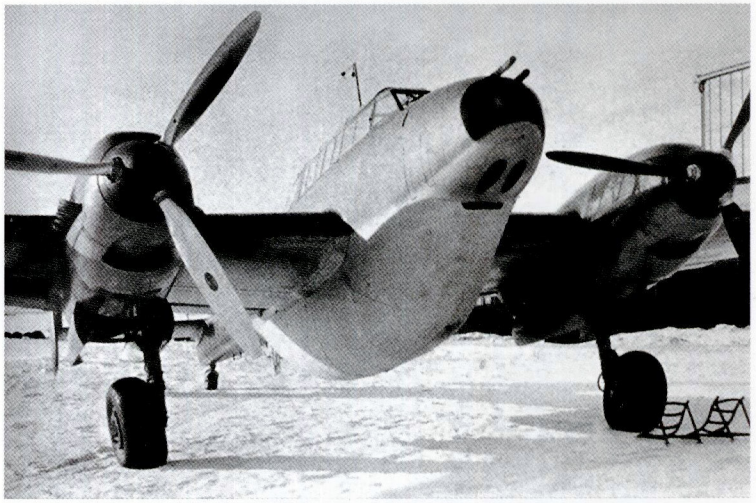
*RIGHT*: Mechanics work on the alignment of the four machine guns in the nose of this C-1, M8+DH, of 1./ZG 76.



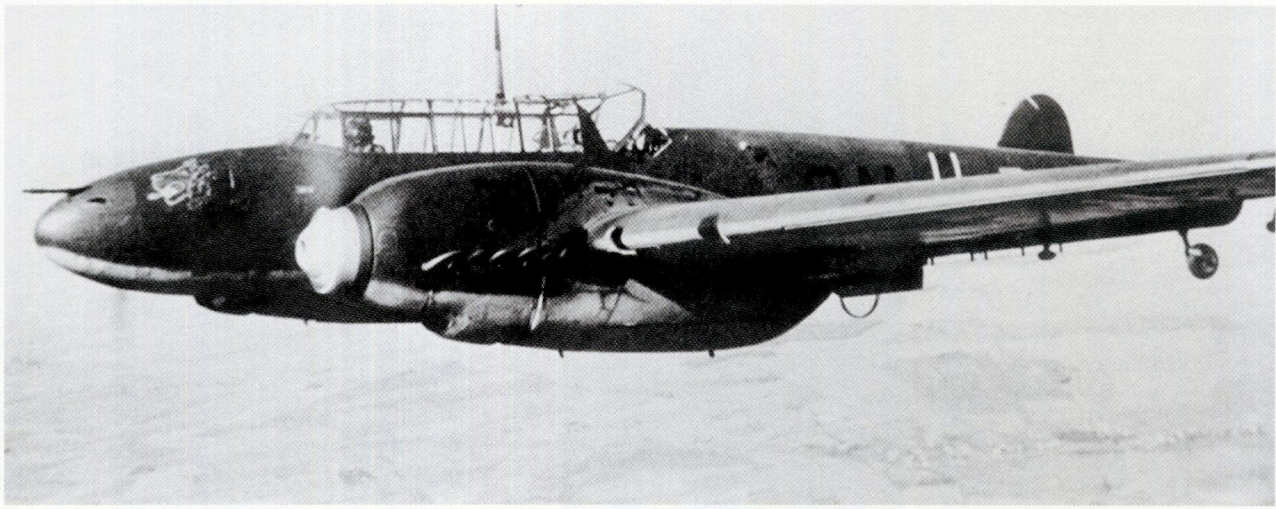

*BELOW*: A C-1 of an unknown Staffel of Zerstörergeschwader 76. Note once again the two antennae running from the cockpit aerial, and the early style underwing cross placed near the wingtip with the individual aircraft letter 'F' inboard of it.

*BELOW*: This Dackelbauch is almost certainly a prototype model. The twin aerials from the cockpit mast, coupled with engines fitted to the 'C' series onwards would point to the airframe being a 'C-1' sub-variant. The Dackelbauch container also appears to be an early version – it would later have a distinctive ribbed frame.





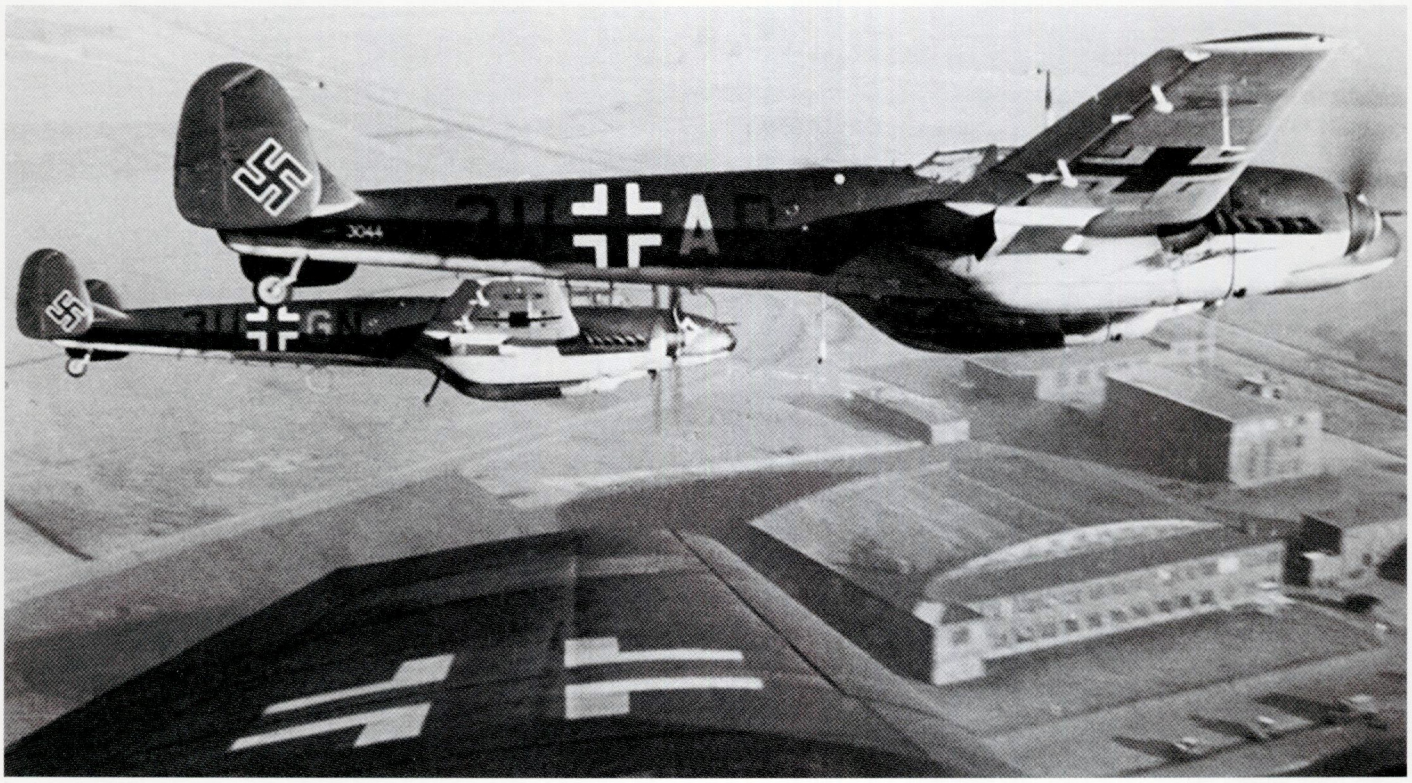
*BELOW*: Aircrew and ground mechanics pose for the camera in front of a Bf 110 D 'Dackelbauch' as it is re-fuelled. Note the re-fuelling point at the front centre of the Dackelbauch.



*RIGHT*: A Bf 110 C of 3./ZG 1 carrying the Staffel emblem of a lion's head on the nose. Note the early style fuselage cross and the light-coloured spinner, almost certainly in the Staffel colour of yellow.

*ABOVE*: 2N+CH of 1./ZG 1 forms a backdrop to the burnt-out remains of 2N+EH of the same Staffel.

*LEFT*: Unlike the previous photograph, the individual aircraft letter on this 1. Staffel, ZG 1 machine is blue outlined in white. This unique choice of Staffel colour for the third character in the fuselage code would be carried forward when the Staffel was re-designated 1./Erpr. Gr. 210.



*ABOVE*: The W. Nr. 3044 on 3U+AP of 6./ZG 26 identifies it as a C-2 sub-variant. The 'A' and the spinner tip are in the Staffel colour of yellow. 3U+GN of 5. Staffel carries a red 'G'. Both aircraft have the revised fuselage cross and the swastika on the fin only.

*BELOW*: This machine belonging to 5./ZG 26 shows a variation in the painted spinners with the main part of the spinner in what appears to be white and black-green, with the tip possibly in another colour. Victory bars can be seen on the port fin above the swastika.

## The Campaign in the West

When the Germans opened the Western campaign the countries opposing them could never have imagined the speed and ingenuity of tactics that were to be employed against them. This was to be no static military operation, but a fast moving campaign utilising both the speed of armoured units and close support from the *Luftwaffe*. This campaign would commit the greatest number of *Zerstörer* units since the start of the war, with over 350 *Bf 110*s available.

Opening in the early hours of 10 May, *Bf 110*s were involved in the action from the start. *II./ZG 1* was charged with a ground-attack mission against Vlissingen airfield, while *I./ZG 1* was to provide escort to *Ju52/3*s. The Dutch Air Force put up spirited resistance, but ultimately was no match for the modern *Luftwaffe* fighters, and by the close of 13 May it effectively ceased to exist.

On 11 May, *I./ZG 2* encountered a section of Hurricanes in the late afternoon. Two *Bf 110*s were lost in the combat which followed, out of a total of seven for the day, *ZG 1* with three and *ZG 26* with two being the other units to report losses. However *II./ZG 76* lodged claims for five French fighters.

12 May saw *III./ZG 26* in action, and the *Gruppe* returned an impressive figure of eight enemy aircraft shot down for no loss. *V.(Z)/LG 1* was also in action on an escort mission, and suffered the loss of three *Bf 110*s shot down. Four out of the six aircrew survived into captivity, however. Meanwhile the relentless German advance continued with increasing victory claims from *Zerstörer* crews.

*Bf 110*s were in action in some strength again on 13 May, with *II./ZG 1* again operating in the role of ground-attack aircraft by strafing enemy airfields. *ZG 26* and *II./ZG 76* also were in action on a day when Sedan fell to the Germans and the course of the campaign shifted heavily in their favour. Among the losses was the *Staffelkapitän* of *5./ZG 1*, *Hptm.* Roderich Küppers who, along with his *Bordfunker, Feldwebel (Fw.)* Erhard Behrend, was shot down and killed by AA fire.

14 May's main event was the desperate attacks by the Allied air forces against the bridges around Sedan, but this proved to be at a heavy cost. The air fighting had cost *I./ZG 52* two aircraft, with *ZG 26* also posting losses and *Lt.* Wolfgang Schenck of *1./ZG 1* getting his damaged *Bf 110* back to base with a wounded *Bordfunker* on board.

15 May proved to be the day of heaviest losses so far for the *Zerstörer* units as contact with enemy fighters west of Sedan increased considerably. This was an ominous portent of things to come. *1./ZG 1* lost two aircraft as a result of their collision; *ZG 2* suffered a single loss; *2./ZG 26* had two aircraft shot down and another two returned damaged with wounded crews on board. Among the *ZG 26* losses was that of the *Gruppenadjutant* of *I. Gruppe*, *Oblt.* Hans-Günther Koch, who was killed in action. Both *Hptm.* Herbert Kaminski, *Staffelkapitän* of *2./ZG 26* and his *Bordfunker* returned to base wounded. *ZG 76* returned details of two *Bf 110*s shot down and one damaged, *6./ZG 76* recording the loss of *Oblt.* Hans-Jochen Knop and his *Bordfunker* who both survived into captivity and later returned to Germany in the forthcoming weeks, as did many others who landed in Allied hands. During the Battle of Britain the RAF would attempt to shoot down many former *Luftwaffe* prisoners again.

*LEFT*: 10 May 1940. Aircrew of 5./ZG 26 gather round to receive instructions about the next mission. On the right of the picture at the front is Alois Komanns, who would be killed in action eight days later.

The following day resulted a lessening of activity, but also saw Wolfgang Schenck of *1./ZG 1* wounded in combat and hospitalised. He would not return to active service until September 1940. The steady toll upon the officer class within the *Zerstörer* continued, with the loss on 16 May of *Lt.* Georg Schwartzer of *15.(Z)/LG 1* and *Lt.* Heinrich Bucksch of *1./ZG 1.*

*V.(Z)/LG 1* was in action once again on 17 May, and it suffered the loss of one of its combat veterans when *Oblt.* Werner Methfessel, *Staffelkapitän* of *14. Staffel*, was shot down and killed, together with his *Bordfunker* to the west of Reims. Losses were relatively light, with *V.(Z)/LG 1* recording two damaged aircraft and *I./ZG 1* submitting one loss, that of *Lt.* Helmut Schwabedissen and his *Bordfunker*, both of *3. Staffel*, killed in action.

On 18 May continuing heavy action resulted in *ZG 26* and *ZG 76* taking the losses in their contact with Allied fighters. The highest ranking officer to be shot down since the war began was posted missing on this day: *Major* Walter Grabmann, *Geschwaderkommodore* of *ZG 76.* He was shot down in M8+XA and survived, later re-joining his unit after a particularly eventful period of captivity. Among the losses suffered by *ZG 26* was that of one of its *Staffelkapitän*, *Hptm.* Eberhard d'Elsa of *5. Staffel.* D'Elsa returned later from captivity, but such were his injuries that he never undertook front line flying duties again.

After the exertions of the previous days, *5./ZG 26* had only three serviceable *Bf 110*s on 19 May. In spite of that, and led by their new *Staffelkapitän, Oblt.* Theodor Rossiwall, a Condor Legion veteran, the crews undertook a mission in concert with other *Bf 110 Staffeln*, and were soon caught up in combat with French *Moranes*. Their aircraft complement was reduced to two when *Oblt.* Artur Niebuhr and his *Bordfunker* had to abandon their aircraft while returning to base.

Losses due to combat on 20 May were few, but of the two losses and one damaged *Bf 110*s recorded, two involved *Staffelkapitäne*. *1./ZG 2* lost *Oblt.* Fritz Lüdders killed in action, while *7./ZG 26* had *Staffelkapitän Oblt.* Kurt-Wilhelm Heinrich wounded. Heinrich succumbed to his injuries on 24 May.

In the following days, the *Zerstörer* units began to meet Spitfires more frequently as the German land forces moved ever closer to the Channel coast, and Spitfire squadrons could operate from the southern airfields in England in support of the increasingly desperate Allied situation in France. During the period 21 to 25 May the losses were spread across the *Zerstörer* units, and fairly minimal, but the pace began to pick up again on 26 May, when the focus of *Luftwaffe* attacks turned to the Allied pocket around Dunkirk.

With attention now firmly on Dunkirk, the RAF effort from bases in England increased considerably, and the losses for the *Bf 110* units in the following days would reflect this, as the limitations of combat with modern single-engined enemy aircraft became clear. It was during this phase of the campaign that *1./ZG 1* started to test the 30 mm cannon-armed *Bf 110 C-6*s that they had taken on charge.

On 26 May *I./ZG 2* suffered a heavy loss when *Gruppenkommandeur Major* Johannes Gentzen crashed while taking off from Neufchâteau and was killed. Gentzen was one of the earliest 'aces' of the *Bf 110* units. The loss was compounded by the fact that *Gruppenadjutant Lt.* Hartwig-Borris Domeier was occupying the *Bordfunker* position and was also killed in the crash. Elsewhere, *I./ZG 1* lost two *Bf 110*s from its *Gruppenstab* (Staff Flight) when *Gruppe* Technical Officer, *Oblt.* Konrad Martin, and *Lt.* Werner Kleinecke failed to return from a combat mission. Kleinecke and his *Bordfunker* Otto Schamberger both later returned from captivity.

27 May presaged further losses, with *I./ZG 52* having three *Bf 110*s shot down. One loss was that of *Lt.* Christian-Friedrich von Neumann, the *Gruppenadjutant*, who was shot down by RAF fighters. The only loss for the rest of the month resulted from a crash during take-off of a *5./ZG 1* machine which was carrying a crew of three for a cross-country flight. All three on board were killed. Matters did not always go the way of the RAF, however. On 31 May *5./ZG 26* had the opportunity to 'bounce' a formation of Spitfires and claimed five victories for no loss to themselves.

In the last days of the Dunkirk evacuation, *Zerstörer* continued to be active. *I./ZG 1* were in action on 1 June, and suffering losses again. With two shot down and two damaged, the aircrew losses included *Oblt.* Jürgen Möller from *2. Staffel* who, together with his *Bordfunker*, survived into captivity. Minimal casualties followed up to 4 June, when the Royal Navy took the last troops off the beaches at Dunkirk.

With the Dunkirk pocket eliminated, the German armed forces turned their attention to the drive south and west. In the first half of June, the German Army's advance continued unabated with *ZG 1* still being heavily involved and carrying most of the losses, albeit relatively lightly. On the credit side, *ZG 26* figured prominently in claiming victories over French aircraft.

One noteworthy event was to occur in the early days of June. On 4 June a formation of *He 111*s flagrantly violated Swiss air space, accompanied by *Bf 110* fighters from *II./ZG 1*. Swiss Air Force *Bf 109*s responded and shot down one of the escorting fighters from *6./ZG 1*. Not satisfied with this, *II./ZG 1*

were tasked to fly over Switzerland once more on 8 June and again Swiss *Bf 109*s took off to intercept. This time the Swiss *Bf 109s* exacted a higher toll than four days previously. *II./ZG 1* suffered the loss of four *Bf 110*s, two from *4. Staffel* and one from each of the other two *Staffeln*. Of the two *4. Staffel* aircraft shot down, three aircrew were killed. The *5. Staffel Bf 110*, a *C-1*, 2N+GN, W. Nr. 2831, was put down relatively intact by *Fw.* Manfred Dähne after taking hits from AA fire and in combat with a Swiss *Bf 109*. Dähne and his *Bordfunker*, Herbert Klinke, were repatriated, and whereas Klinke survived the war, Dähne was to lose his life over England later in the year. The *6. Staffel* aircraft to be lost was that of *Staffelkapitän*, *Oblt.* Gerhard Kadow. Kadow, like Dähne, would be shot down over England a few weeks later, but unlike Dähne he would became a prisoner of the British. Swiss losses amounted to one *Bf 109 E* which belly-landed after combat. After this incursion on 8 June, and the consequent losses to the *Luftwaffe*, no further forays by *Bf 110* units were made over Swiss air space.

As the month progressed and matters drew to their inevitable conclusion in the Western campaign, *ZG 26* bore the brunt of most of the losses in combat. All *Zerstörer* units would soon be preparing for the next campaign: the attack on, and potential invasion of, Great Britain.

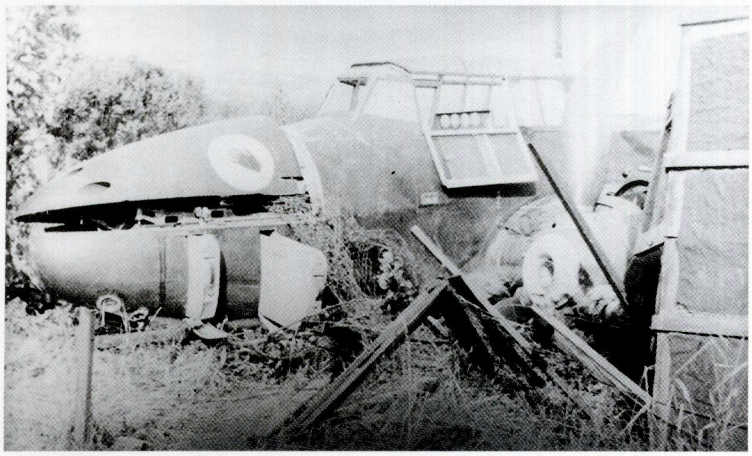
*BELOW*: Bf 110 C-1, W. Nr. 2831, of Fw. Manfred Dähne and his Bordfunker Herbert Klinke. Dähne and Klinke took part in II./ZG 1's excursion over Switzerland on 8 June 1940.

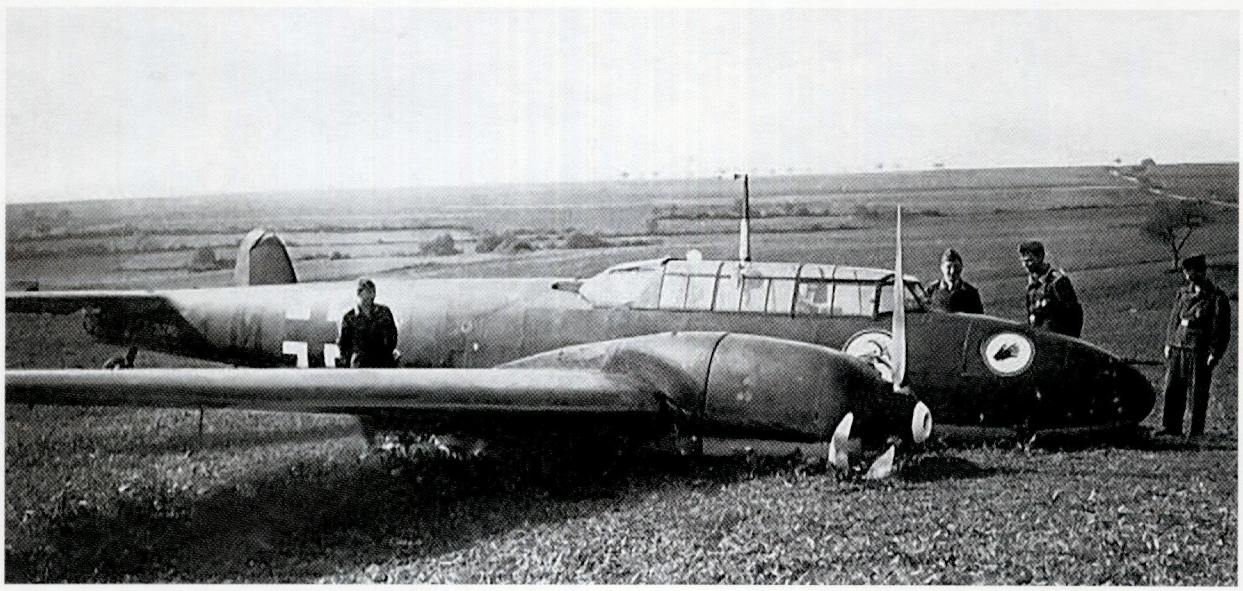
*RIGHT*: The result of Dähne and Klinke's flight over Switzerland on 8 June. Dähne managed to put 2N+GN down in good condition following a fighter attack from a Swiss Bf 109 and hits from Flak. Both were repatriated. Dähne was killed in action later in the Battle of Britain; Klinke, after recovering from his wounds, went on to serve on the Russian front with SKG 210 and ZG 1 and survived the war.

*LEFT*: On 13 May 1940 Uffz. Bechthold of 14.(Z)/LG 1 overran the airfield at Mannheim upon landing after a combat mission in L1+KK, resulting in this classic 'Fliegerdenkmal' pose.

*BELOW*: L1+JH, a Bf 110 C-1 of 13.(Z)/LG 1. This machine carries the early style fuselage cross, and the spinner tips and individual aircraft letter of 'J' are in the Staffel colour of white.

*RIGHT, BELOW AND BELOW RIGHT*: Three views of a crash-landed Bf 110, 3M+KH, of 1./ZG 2, showing the red hand on a white circle emblem of I./ZG 2.

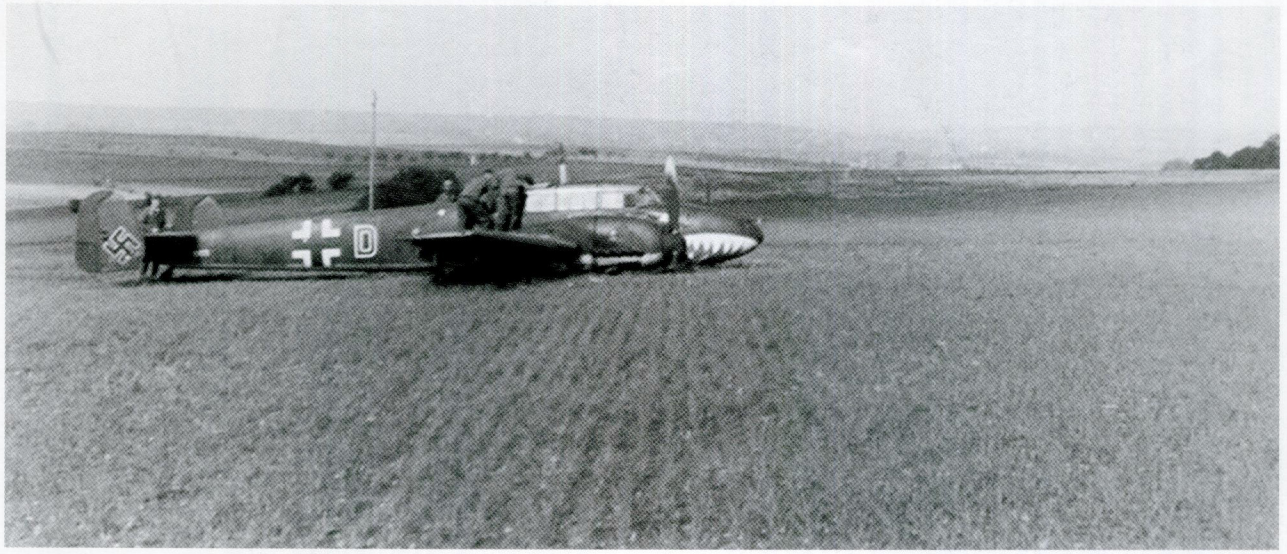




*LEFT*: Another view of a crash-landed Bf 110 from I./ZG 2. Note the variation in the hand emblem, and the 'Bernberger Jäger' emblem beneath the cockpit.

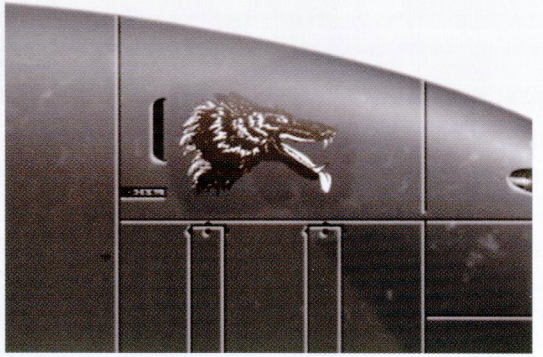
*LEFT*: M8+DN of 5./ZG 76.

*BELOW*: 29 May 1940. M8+DN of 5./ZG 76 crash-landed north-west of St. Omer following damage in combat, with Bordfunker Uffz. Albert Links wounded.



*RIGHT*: Belly-landed Bf 110 C-2 of I./ZG 52, which again does not carry the Gruppe emblem. The Werknummer of the aircraft can be seen in white on the rear fuselage. Note the larger style fuselage cross.

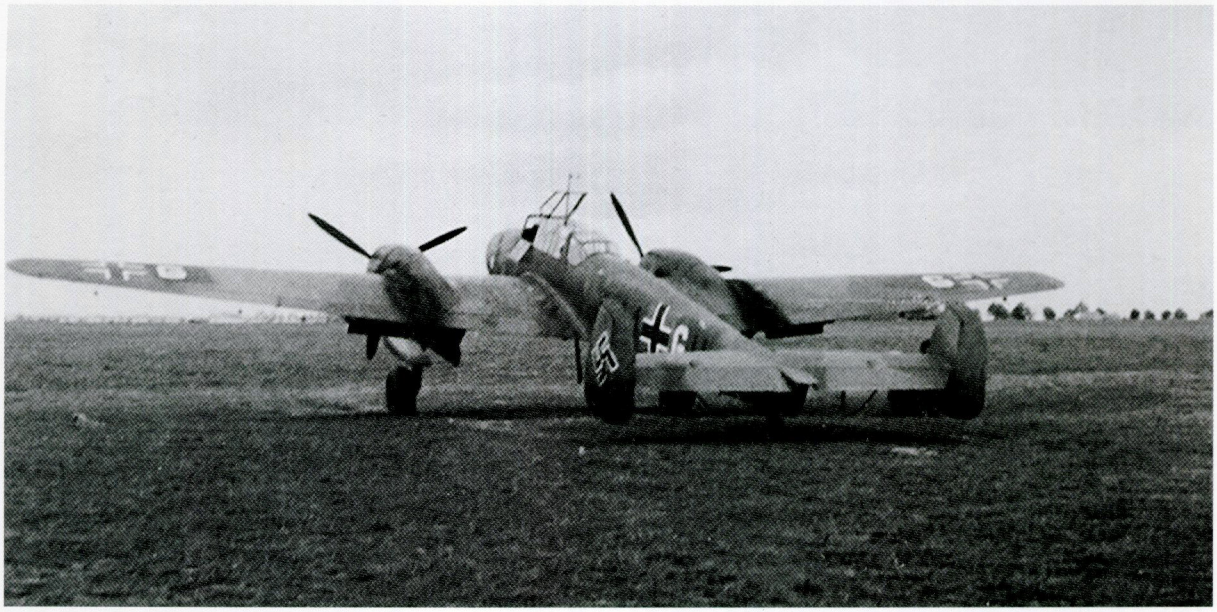
*LEFT*: A card game in progress featuring, from left to right, Fw. Schob, Fw. Kobert, Ofw. Stegemann and Fw. Hoffmann, all from 13. Staffel, Lehrgeschwader 1. L1+EK of 14. Staffel forms a backdrop to the game. Schob survived the war; Kobert was shot down into captivity on 1 September 1940; Stegemann was killed when his Bf 110 crashed on take-off on 21 May 1940 and Hoffmann was killed in action on 15 September 1940 flying as Bordfunker to Staffelkapitän Hptm. Helmut Müller.



**Messerschmitt Bf 110 C-1 of 14.(Z)/LG 1**

**L1+EK displays the early style two-tone green camouflage with the later style fuselage cross. The small wolf's head Gruppe emblem can just be seen on the forward fuselage. This 'C' has the rounded wingtips of the earlier 'B' variant.**

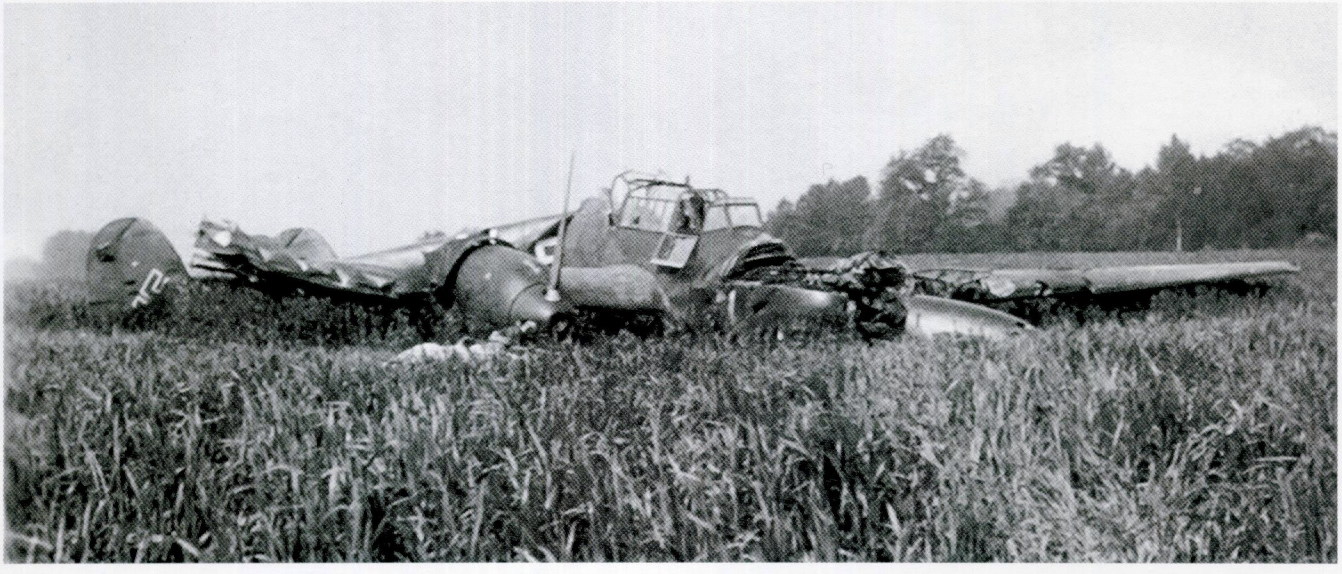
*LEFT*: A 2./ZG 52 Bf 110 C showing once again the wide spacing of the unit code characters and the larger fuselage cross. The swastika is carried on the fin only. What appears to be netting of some kind partially covers the fuselage cross and completely obscures the third character of the fuselage code, the individual aircraft letter.



*RIGHT*: Bf 110 C-1, L1+GH of 13.(Z)/LG 1. This machine carries the early style fuselage cross and has its individual aircraft letter, 'G' inboard of the upper surface wing cross.

*LEFT*: L1+AK of 14.(Z)/LG 1 following a crash landing. This C-1 carries the larger size fuselage cross and the individual aircraft letter 'A' is outlined in white.

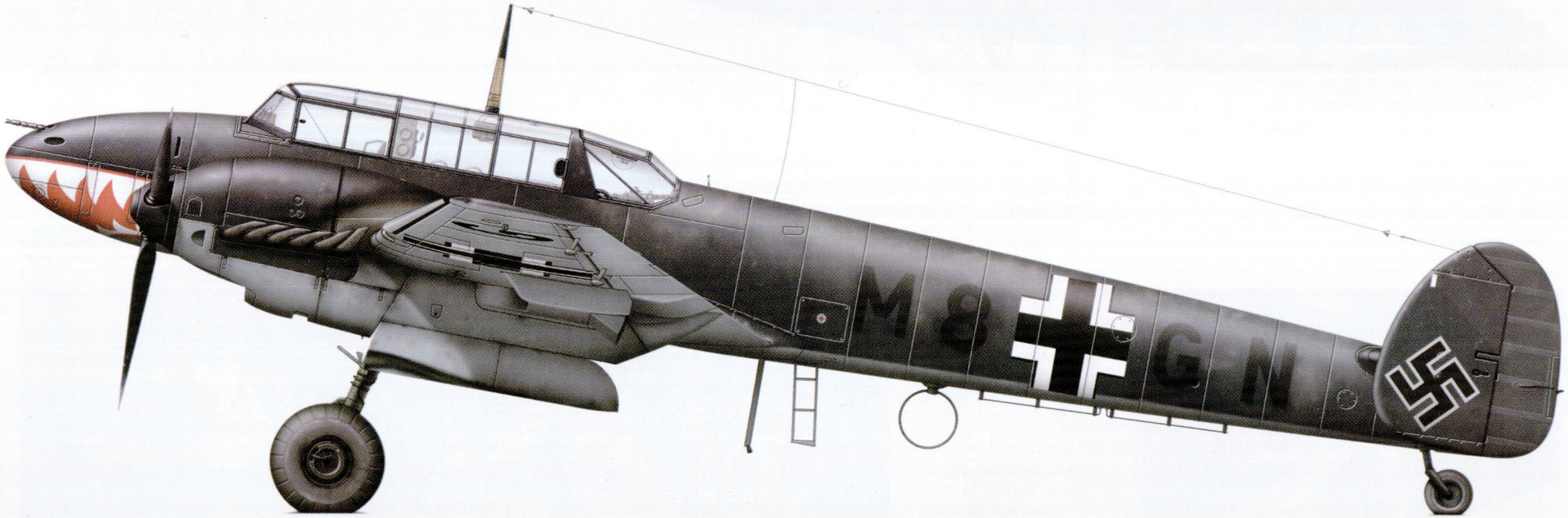
*LEFT*: A formation of Ju 87s fly over Bf 110 Cs of II./ZG 1. The distinctive 'three wasps above clouds' emblem is carried on the nose of all three Bf 110s.



*ABOVE*: The remains of a Bf 110 brought down during the Western Campaign.

*RIGHT*: 2N+GH forms a backdrop for Victor Mölders and Staffelhund during the Western campaign. The fuselage cross is draped with an identical covering to that seen in an earlier photograph of a ZG 52 Bf 110.

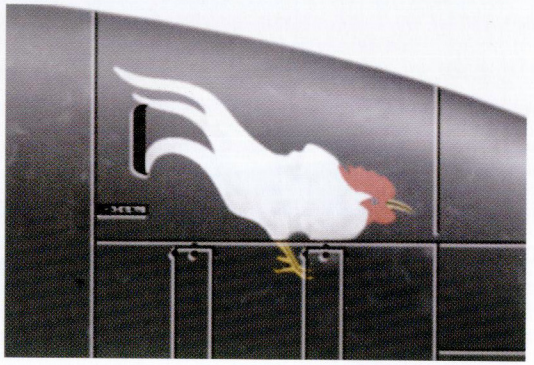
*RIGHT*: This Bf 110 C, M8+GN, carries two-tone green camouflage down the fuselage sides, with the standard size fuselage cross and swastika on the fin only, features which became more prevalent as the Luftwaffe headed into the Battle of Britain. The fin carries one victory bar.




**Messerschmitt Bf 110 C of 5./ZG 76**

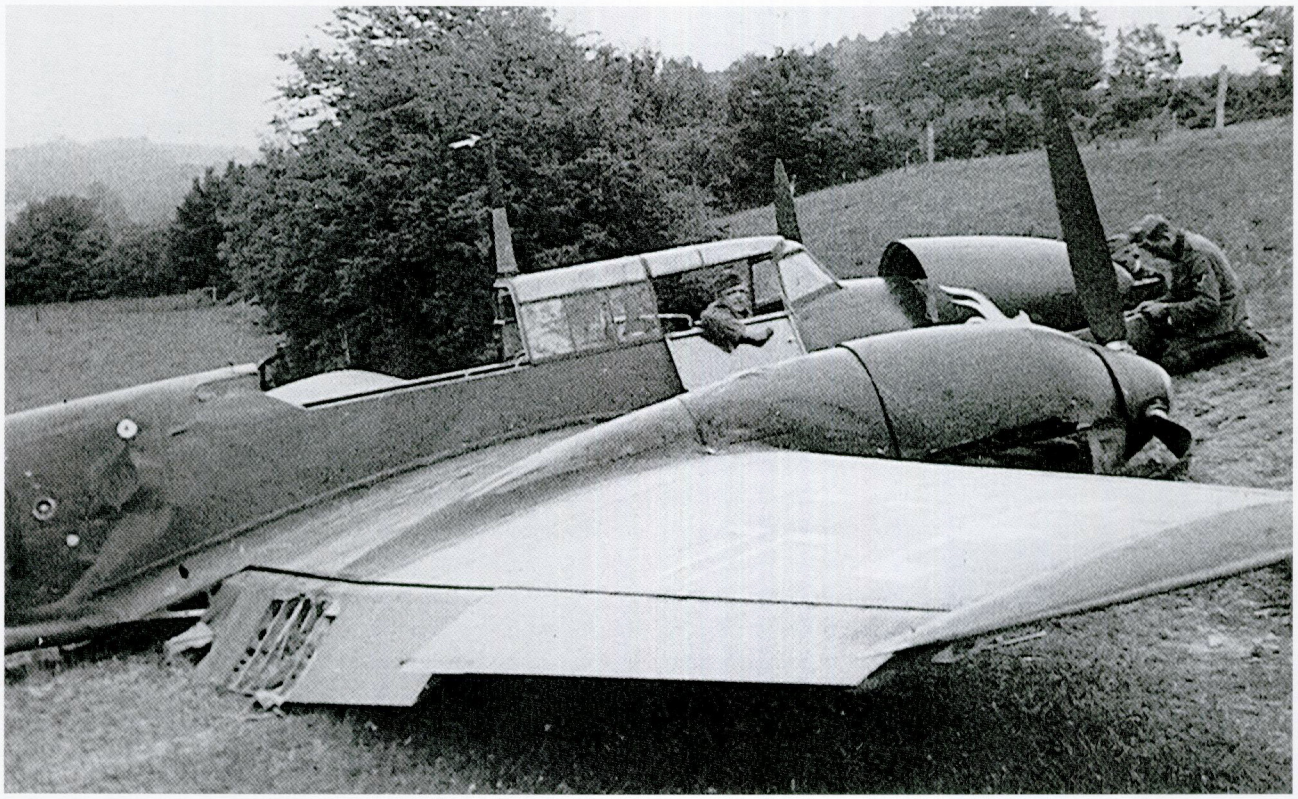
**Black 'G' of 5./ZG 76 carries features that were common to this Gruppe throughout 1940. The distinctive 'Sharksmouth', emblem adorns the lower nose, while a solid two-tone upper surface camouflage of 70/71 is seen. Unlike other units, II./ZG 76 did not lighten the fuselage sides of its aircraft and this upper surface scheme was carried to the end of the Battle of Britain. The later-style larger fuselage cross is evident, the swastika is now painted on the fin only, and one victory bar is painted on the port fin.**

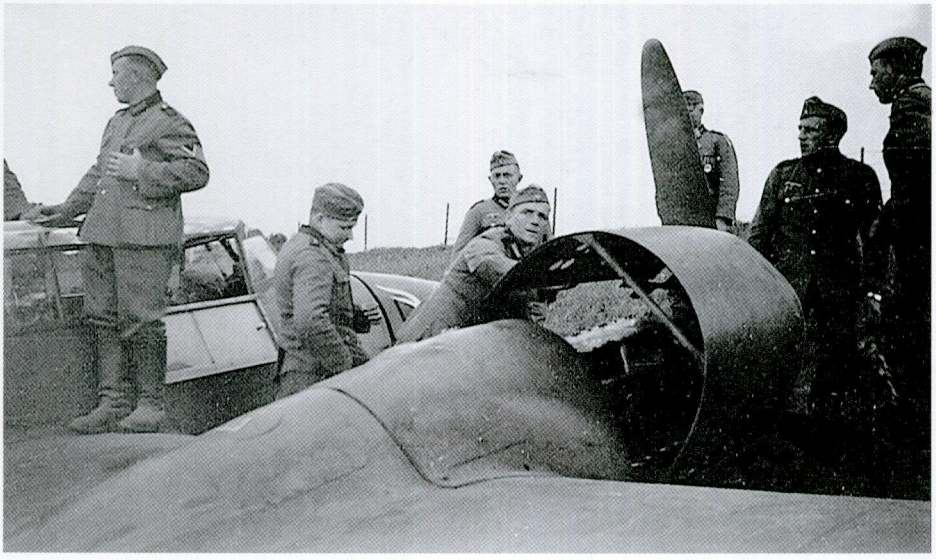
*THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE*: Four views of Bf 110 C, 3U+ET which has come to rest on the sloping incline of a field. The emblem of 9. Staffel can be clearly seen on the nose, and the individual aircraft letter, 'E', and the spinner tips are in the Staffel colour of yellow.



**Messerschmitt Bf 110 C of 9./ZG 26**

**3U+ET has the solid two-tone camouflage that was prevalent in the early months of 1940. The individual aircraft letter and the spinner tips are in the Staffel colour of yellow. The 9. Staffel emblem of a cockerel is carried on the nose. Note the relatively wide spacing of the letters and number of the fuselage code.**





# Battle of Britain

In the campaign against the British Isles in 1940, the *Luftwaffe* was potentially entering for the first time a static campaign. It required a completely different approach to that applied in the Spanish Civil War and to the other campaigns in the previous nine months. There would be no advancing front line, no direct support to ground troops. In front of them, instead of the pell-mell retreat of enemy ground forces and the consequent lack of a co-ordinated approach of the opposing air forces to take them on, the *Luftwaffe* units and crews would find themselves up against the most modern aerial defensive system in the world at that time, fielding fighters that were equal to their own single-engined *Messerschmitt Bf 109*s, and more than capable of taking on the twin-engined *Messerschmitt Bf 110s* and the *Stukas* and bombers in their armoury. A tracking system that picked raids up as they formed off the French coast, and continued to monitor their progress inland after they crossed the English coast through the Royal Observer Corps, was the kind of surveillance never before encountered by the *Luftwaffe*. Moreover, following the Polish, Scandinavian and Western campaigns, the *Luftwaffe* would also be facing an air force which, for the first time, had a considerable number of pilots who had already faced it in combat. An additional factor in the equation was the 'no man's land' separating the two sides. The English Channel, 22 miles at its narrowest point, gnawed away at the psyche of *Luftwaffe* crews with the ever-present fear of a faltering aircraft plunging down into it, or a healthy fighter aircraft running out of fuel before reaching the safety of land on the other side. '*Kanalkrankheit*' (Channel sickness) was an unwitting ally of the defending British force. In the light of post-war knowledge the functions of the intelligence sections of both sides also had a major role to play in the ultimate shape of the Battle, and its outcome. The RAF had a detailed knowledge of the *Luftwaffe*, its dispositions, locations and strengths, its personalities and morale, and this knowledge grew as the Battle progressed. Surreptitious processing of prisoners, by means of 'stool pigeons' and hidden microphones, as well as normal interrogation and filtering of possessions founded on downed airmen, all added to the overall picture of the *Luftwaffe* put together by the RAF's Intelligence Section. The *Luftwaffe* had an equally extensive Intelligence Section, but it seemed to be flawed in that it appeared to take at face value all the reports from *Luftwaffe* crews concerning the number of RAF aircraft shot down, and the damage caused to airfield and ground installations. Over-estimation leading to over-optimistic assessment would be a crucial factor in the summer of 1940.

*ABOVE*: A ground mechanic poses in front of a Bf 110 C of II./ZG 1. The emblem of three wasps above a cloud can be seen to good advantage, as can the two tone upper surface camouflage of RLM 70 and 71.

*LEFT*: A view of a II./ZG 1 machine inside a hangar. The starboard spinner tip appears to be in yellow when contrasted with the white of the wasps' wings, which would indicate a 6. Staffel aircraft. The forward section of the starboard engine cowling is unusually free from any staining or oil smears.

## July

On 1 July the only unit formed specifically for operations against the United Kingdom came into existence. *Erprobungsgruppe 210 (Erpr. Gr. 210)*, which translates roughly as Test Wing 210, was formed at Köln-Ostheim airfield under the command of *Hptm.* Walter Rubensdörffer. Rubensdörffer, a Legion Condor veteran, had spent a period of time at the Air Ministry before taking up his new post. The unit has previously been credited with having hand-picked crews, or being a unit with elite flyers. Neither is correct. The unit was formed from existing units and crews posted in, mainly straight out of training school. *1. Staffel* was formed from *1./ZG 1* (apart from *Lt.* Victor Mölders who went to night fighters, and *Lt.* Horst Marx who moved to the *Bf 109 E*-equipped *3. Staffel* of *Erpr. Gr. 210*). *2. Staffel* was formed from *3. Staffel, Stukageschwader 77* (*StG. 77*), and *3. Staffel* was formed from *4. Staffel, Jagdgeschwader 186 (4./JG 186)*. Among the crews posted straight in from training were *Lt.* Erich Beudel and his *Bordfunker, Obergefreiter* (*Ogefr.*) Heinrich Diemer, and *Uffz.* Werner Neumann and his *Bordfunker, Ogefr.* Karl Stoff. Additionally, because of his specialist (albeit limited) knowledge of using the *Bf 109 E* as a fighter-bomber, *Hptm.* Karl Valesi was seconded to *3. Staffel*.

In the weeks leading up to the formation of *Erpr. Gr 210*, the expectation was that the unit would oversee the testing and operational development of the projected *Messerschmitt Me 210*. However such were the delays in that aircraft's programme development that the unit was used instead to develop the fighter-bomber concept. Allied to that, the *Messerschmitt Bf 110 C-6* aircraft on charge with *1./ZG 1* were transferred with the crews to *1./Erpr. Gr. 210*, and the new *Staffel* operated these aircraft in July and the first half of August in missions against England. The 'C-6', of which only 12 were ever built, was not a bomb-carrying *Bf 110* – it carried a 30 mm cannon housed in a large fairing under the central fuselage in place of the standard two 20 mm cannon. The 30 mm cannon-armed *Bf 110* was factory built; it was not a modification that could be fitted 'in the field'. Erroneously referred to in most publications as the MK 101, the correct designation for the 30 mm cannon of 1940 was, in fact, MG 101. All armament of 'cannon' calibre (i.e. 20 mm or above) in the *Luftwaffe* in 1940 was referred to as 'MG': witness the MG-FF and MG-FF/M 20 mm guns in both the *Bf 109* and *Bf 110*.

The unit code for *Erprobungsgruppe 210* was 'S9'. However, the *Bf 110 C-6*s retained their old unit codes of '2N' until the first fighter-bombers were taken on charge by *1. Staffel* at the end of the first week in August. It was only then that all the unit's aircraft carried the 'S9' code. *2. Staffel* and the *Gruppenstab* took on charge the first batch of 13 *Bf 110 D-0/B* fighter-bombers delivered from the factory. In the forthcoming weeks these units would figure prominently in the developing battle for supremacy of the skies over England.

By 1. July the re-organisation of the *Zerstörer* forces was complete. Whereas *ZG 26* remained intact, *ZG 2*, previously a single *Gruppe*, was increased to two *Gruppen* strength with *I./ZG 52* being re-designated *II./ZG 2*. *ZG 1* was disbanded. With *1. Staffel* becoming *1./Erpr. Gr. 210*, the other two *Staffeln* of *I. Gruppe*

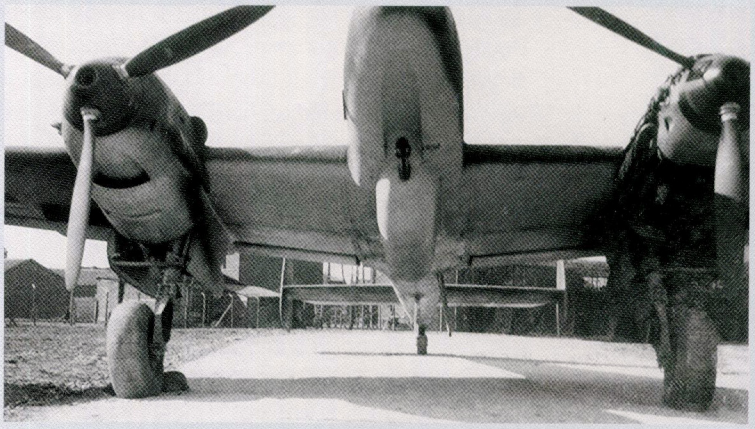
*LEFT*: 2N+RH, a Bf 110 C-6 of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210. The white/blue/white spinners can be clearly seen, as can the unique practice of 1. Staffel of using blue as the colour for the third character of the fuselage code, the individual aircraft letter.

# The Messerschmitt Bf 110 C-6

A somewhat unusual aircraft appeared in the skies of Western Europe in the spring and summer of 1940. Whereas in the standard Bf 110 fighter there was a change from the two 20 mm MG-FF cannon to the improved MG-FF/M, in the C-6 sub-variant there was a radical adjustment to the armament in the lower nose. This involved a change that could only be undertaken in the construction factory, not in the field. In place of the two 20 mm cannon, a single 30 mm cannon, housed in a large fairing, was mounted centrally under the fuselage.

The origins of this cannon could be found in the Solothurn S-18-1000 20 mm anti-tank rifle. Rheinmetall took that design and scaled it up to a 30 mm configuration. The test bed for the installation of the prototype in a Bf 110 was Bf 110 B-1, D-AAPY. Air tests were considered a success, and plans were set in place for a production version.

In 1940, all guns of 20 mm calibre or higher were still designated '*Gewehr*' (gun), not '*Kanone*' (cannon), hence the MG-FF and MG-FF/M 20 mm armament in Bf 109 Es of 1940. The 30 mm *Kanone* installed in the C-6 was given the designation 'MG 101'. One pilot, when questioned about the qualities of the C-6, stated that the fitment of the 30 mm cannon actually improved the flying characteristics of the machine, as the placement of the cannon changed the centre of gravity of the aircraft, making it far easier to handle in the air.



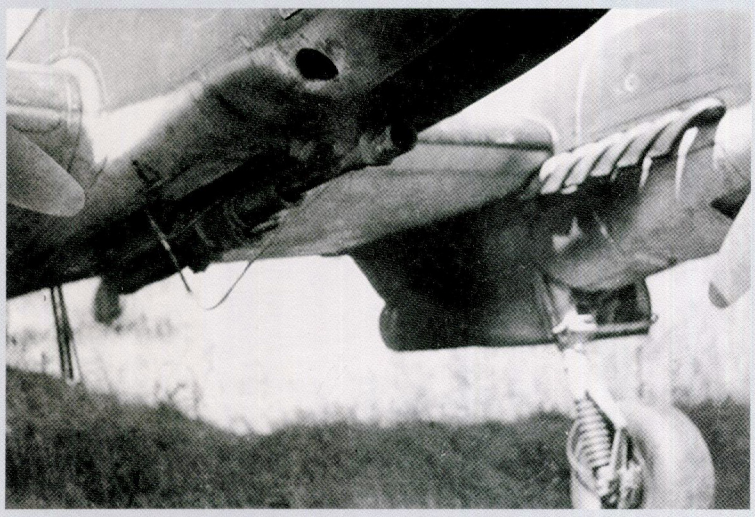
*ABOVE*: A head-on view of the 30 mm MG 101 Kanone fitted to a Bf 110 C-6 of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210.

In early June 1940 two Bf 110 C-6s were issued to 1. *Staffel*, *Zerstörergeschwader* 1 for operational testing. These aircraft were allocated to two of the most experienced pilots of the *Staffel*, *Oberleutnant* Martin Lutz, and *Oberleutnant* Victor Mölders. Their remit was to test the aircraft's capability in attacks against ground targets, with the caveat that under no circumstances should the aircraft fall into enemy hands. After a regular bomber escort mission, the two pilots, with their *Bordfunkers*, would take off in the C-6s and seek out targets of opportunity. The Staffel took on charge more C-6s during June, and upon its re-designation to 1. *Staffel*, *Erprobungsgruppe* 210 on 1 July 1940, it took its C-6s with it to this new experimental unit. Ultimately, a total of only 12 C-6s would be issued from the Gotha factory.

Upon its formation, *Erprobungsgruppe* 210 had a mixed bag of aircraft types. 1. Staffel had only C-6s; Gruppenstab and 2. Staffel took on charge the first batch of Messerschmitt Bf 110 fighter-bombers, designated Bf 110 D-0/Bs, and 3. *Staffel* were outfitted with the fighter-bomber version of the Messerschmitt Bf 109, the Bf 109 E-4/B. With this melange of Messerschmitts, *Erprobungsgruppe* 210 entered the Battle of Britain.

Evidence from the flight log book of *Leutnant* Erich Beudel of 1./*Erpr. Gr.* 210 shows that the individual aircraft letter (the third character in the fuselage code) of the C-6s with 1./ZG 1 and 1./Erpr. Gr. 210 was selected from the second half of the alphabet. *Leutnant* Erich Beudel flew C-6s between 9 July and 15 August with the individual letters 'P', 'R', 'O' 'N' 'S' and 'T'. Additionally, the old unit designation of ZG 1, '2N' (the first two characters of the fuselage code) was carried on the C-6s of 1./*Erpr. Gr.* 210 until the *Staffel* received its first batch of D-0/B fighter-bombers in early August, when all aircraft of the Staffel then carried the *Erprobungsgruppe* 210 code of 'S9'.

*BELOW*: The 30 mm. Kanone installation with the fairing removed.



In July and early August, the C-6s were involved in providing escort to the Bf 110 fighter-bombers of the unit carrying out attacks on shipping around the south-east coast of England and undertaking armed reconnaissance missions seeking out convoys and reporting back their position. On occasion they would also carry out attacks on ships with the 30 mm cannon if a suitable opportunity presented itself. It was on one such escort mission, on 29 July, that the aircraft of *Leutnant* Erich Beudel was hit in combat with Hurricanes of 151 Squadron, and he managed to crash-land his damaged Bf 110 C-6, 2N+RH, back in France with his *Bordfunker*, *Obergefreiter* Heinrich Diemer, being hospitalised due to wounds he received during combat. The Staffel recorded losses of C-6s in action on 30 July (one), and 11 August (two) when it operated a mixed force of C-6s and D-0/Bs for the first time. With the arrival of

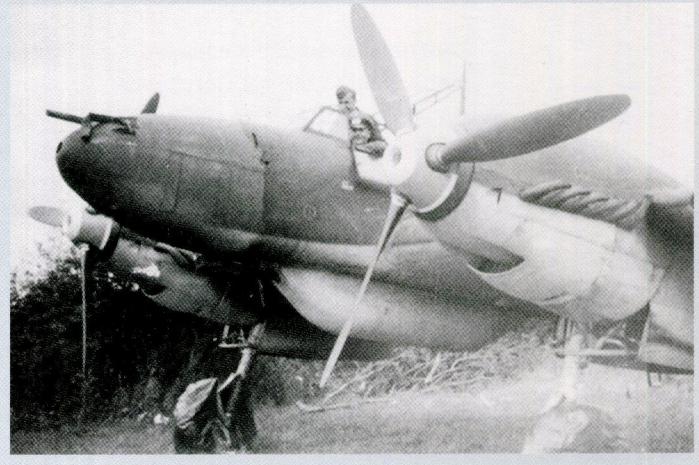
*ABOVE*: Balthasar Aretz sits on the cockpit sill of this Bf 110 C-6 of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210. Note the hinge on the starboard side of the fairing allowing the housing to swing down for servicing and maintenance of the 30 mm. Kanone.

the D-0/B aircraft, and the shift of the *Luftwaffe* to land targets, the use of the C-6 diminished. However, on the raid against Croydon in the early evening of 15 August, one C-6 was lost, the only one to crash on the English mainland during the entire course of the Battle of Britain. *Leutnant* Erich Beudel and his new *Bordfunker*, Otto Jordan, were both killed as a result of being shot down in S9+TH. This gave the RAF, and in particular the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough, the opportunity to examine the MG 101 and its armament.

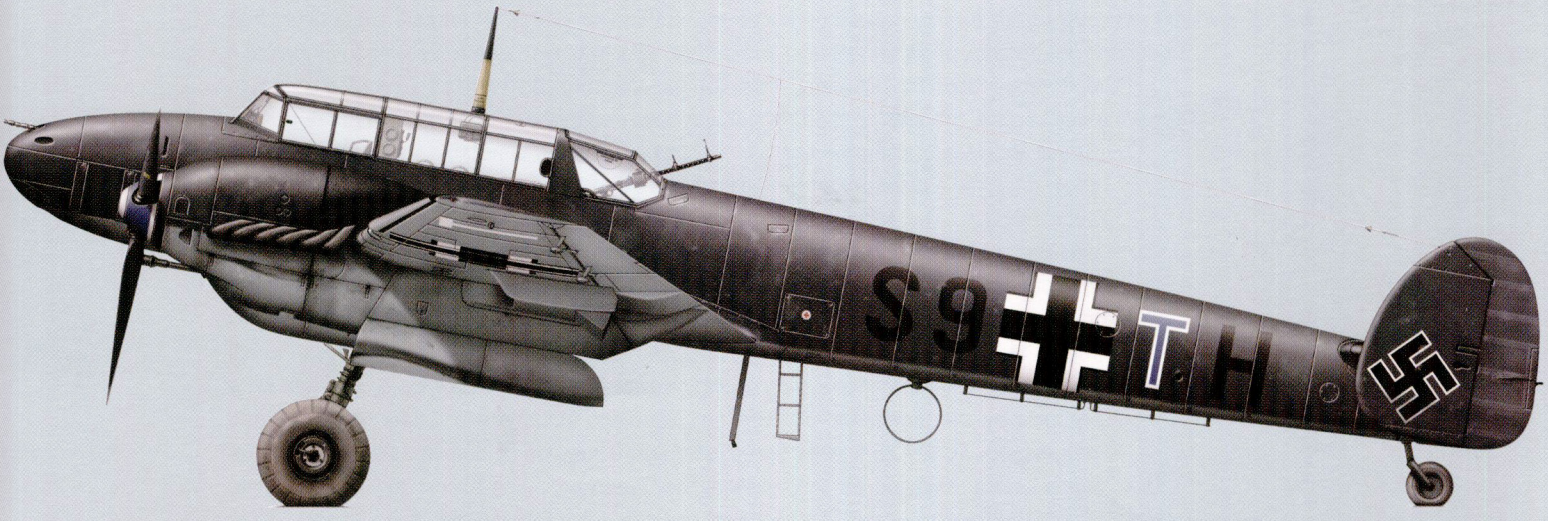
The remaining C-6s were retained by *Erprobungsgruppe* 210, and when that unit was redesignated *Schnellkampfgeschwader* 210 in April 1941 and transferred to the East weeks later to take part in the assault on Russia, the C-6s moved with it. Evidence from the damage/loss reports shows that the remaining C-6s were distributed to the II. *Gruppe* of the new unit. Inevitably, further losses were suffered. On 18 October 1941 a C-6 coded S9+AM of 4./SKG 210 did not return from a combat mission south of Moscow, and on 16 December a further C-6 coded S9+MN of 5./SKG 210 failed to return from operations. An interesting point about this loss was the fact that the aircraft carried three personnel rather than the usual two. As well as a pilot and *Bordfunker*, a '*Waffenwart*', a member of the ground crew specialising in armament, was also listed as missing. His presence on board may have meant the *Staffel* was having problems with the 30 mm cannon and the *Waffenwart* went along to assess what was happening under combat conditions. The final recorded loss of a C-6 within the lineage of *Erpr. Gr.* 210 – SKG 210 – ZG 1 occurred on 27 February 1942 when S9+SP of 6./ZG 1 was lost south of Mosalsk.

Later in the war three C-6s were in service with III./ZG 26 in North Africa. Their allocation to that unit almost certainly came about through the C-6s being sent to a repair facility, and then issued to a front line unit requiring replacement aircraft.

Although the C-6 passed into history, the principle of mounting a heavy calibre weapon under the fuselage of the Bf 110 did not cease. Later in the war, the Bf 110 G-2 variant was fitted with a 37 mm cannon, known as the 'Flak 18', with the intended purpose of using it as a tank destroyer. It was, however, later used in action against American bomber formations.



*BELOW*: The 30 mm Kanone is clearly seen on this Bf 110 C-6 of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210. Note the aperture in the nose for the gun-camera, and the distinctive colours of the spinners: white/blue/white. The pilot in the cockpit has not been identified.




**Messerschmitt Bf 110 C-6 of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210**

**One of only 12 Bf 110s armed with a single 30 mm cannon under the fuselage, this aircraft of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210 was shot down following the early evening raid on Croydon on 15th August, taking the pilot, Lt. Erich Beudel, and his 19 year-old Bordfunker, Ogefr. Otto Jordan, to their deaths. The early style solid two-tone green upper surface camouflage of 70/71 is carried. The unusually-coloured spinners in white/blue/white are shown, as is the individual aircraft letter of 'T' in blue outlined in white – a deviation from standard practise.**

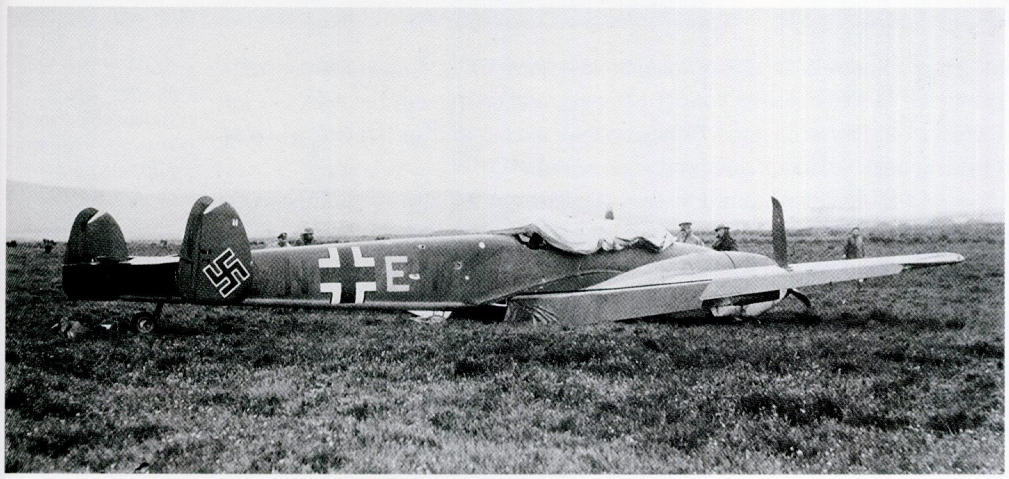
*LEFT*: Two unknown crewmen face the camera in front of M8+LN of 5./ZG 76.

were transferred to the emerging night fighter force. *II. Gruppe, ZG 1* was re-designated *III./ZG 76*, to bring that unit up to the full *Geschwader* complement of three *Gruppen*. An interesting point regarding the two *Gruppen* which were re-designated was that both *II./ZG 2* and *III./ZG 76* retained their old *Gruppe* and *Staffel* identification letters in the unit code applied to the fuselages of their aircraft. Thus, *II./ZG 2*, instead of changing the fourth character to 'M' (*4. Staffel*), 'N' (*5. Staffel*) and 'P' (*6. Staffel*), continued to use 'H' (*1. Staffel*), 'K' (*2. Staffel*) and 'L' (*3. Staffel*) of *I. Gruppe* on their machines, as well as the unit code of 'A2'. Equally, *III./ZG 76* continued to use 'M' (*4. Staffel*), 'N' (*5. Staffel*) and 'P' (*6. Staffel*) when in fact it should have been using 'R' (*7. Staffel*), 'S' (*8. Staffel*) and 'T' (*9. Staffel*). Moreover, the aircraft of *III./ZG 76* retained their old unit code of '2N' throughout the Battle, and indeed right through to April 1941 when it formed the *II. Gruppe* of *Schnellkampfgeschwader* 210 (*SKG 210*), only then changing its unit code to 'S9'. The reason for retaining the old *Gruppe* and *Staffel* identifications has never been explained. The likely explanation is that adherence to standard *Luftwaffe* practice was simply ignored. It was no great task to overpaint letters on either side of the fuselage on about a dozen aircraft in each *Staffel*.

*BELOW*: Hptm. Horst Liensberger, Gruppen-kommandeur of V.(Z)/LG 1 who led the Gruppe throughout 1940 until being killed in action over England on 27 September 1940.

While a *Bf 110 D-0* of *Aufklärungsgruppe Oberbefehlshaber der Luftwaffe* (a *Luftwaffe* Headquarters-based unit) did not return from a reconnaissance sortie to Scotland on 6 July, it appears most likely that *V.(Z)/LG 1*, under the leadership of *Hptm.* Horst Liensberger, was the first *Zerstörer* unit to undertake operations over the Channel. The Gruppe commenced with an escort mission to *Stukas* on 4 July and on the forthcoming days continued with further escort duties for *Stuka* and reconnaissance aircraft. *V.(Z)/LG 1* claimed a notable success on 9 July, when it lodged a claim for all three Hurricanes of 43 Squadron encountered during one such mission. The fact was that only one Hurricane was lost, an early indication, perhaps, of the overclaiming that would infect both sides missions, and the numbers on both sides embroiled in combat, increased over the ensuing weeks. Along with its first claim in this new campaign, the unit also suffered its inevitable first loss on 9 July when the *Bf 110* of *Oblt.* Joachim Glienke and *Ogefr.* Karl Hoyer ditched in the Channel on the return flight from one such escort mission. On this occasion both crewmen were rescued by the *Seenotdienst*. The unit was not to be so fortunate as the Battle progressed. *III./ZG 26* flew its first mission on 9 July, losing one *Bf 110*, but it was far more heavily engaged on the following day when providing escort to *Do 17*s out to attack the convoy 'Bread'. Tangling with the defending RAF fighters, the *Zerstörer* pilots filed claims for a total of 12 Spitfires and Hurricanes. With the escorting *Bf 109*s claiming a further 11, the total of 23 was wildly inaccurate; in fact the true RAF losses were one shot down, one crash-landed and two damaged. In return *III./ZG 26* lost three *Bf 110s* and another returned to France damaged.

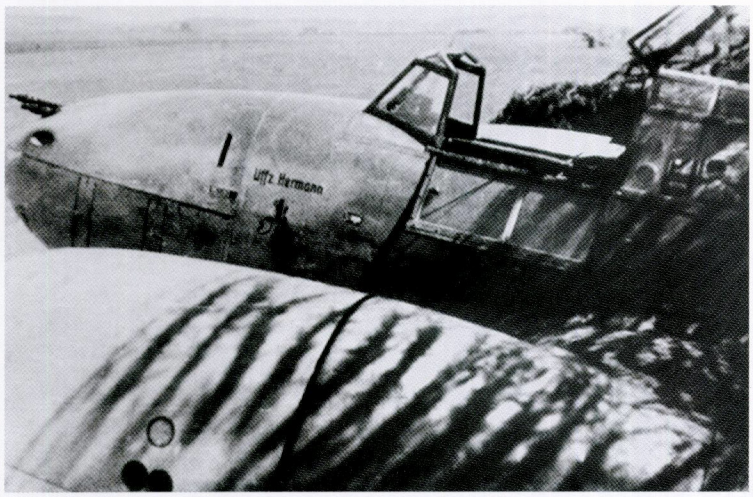
*III./ZG 76* was in action on 11 July, flying its first mission over the Channel as escort to *Ju 87*s. Initial underestimation of the strength of the raid soon changed and the *Messerschmitts* came under fierce attack, elements of 87, 238 and 601 Squadrons being involved. Once again the officer class in the *Zerstörer Staffeln* was hit hard: the flamboyantly-named *Lt.* Friedrich-Wolfgang Graf von und zu Castell of *7. Staffel* was shot down into the Channel, and the *Staffelkapitän* of *9. Staffel*, *Oblt.* Gerhard Kadow, recently returned from a sojourn in Switzerland, set down his *Bf 110 C-4*, 2N+EP, following combat inland of the English coast, near Lulworth. The most notable loss was the nephew of Hermann Göring, *Oblt.* Hans-Joachim Göring, also of *9. Staffel*, whose *Bf 110* smashed into the ground with such force near Portland that no trace was ever found of him or his *Bordfunker*. *Lt.* Joachim Schröder completed the losses for *9. Staffel* and the *Gruppe*, surviving into captivity whereas his unfortunate *Bordfunker* was killed. A very sobering first mission for the *Gruppe* against opposition that proved to be determined and well directed by RDF.



*LEFT AND BELOW*: Two views of Bf 110 C-4, 2N+EP, W. Nr. 3551, from 9./ZG 76 shot down on 11 July 1940. Staffelkapitän, Oblt. Gerhard Kadow, made a relatively good landing at Grange Heath, near Lulworth, both he and Bordfunker Gefr. Helmut Scholz surviving into captivity. Parts from this aircraft would later be used to get another captured Bf 110, 5F+CM, up to flying condition for the RAF to test-fly.

On 13 July *Erpr. Gr. 210* undertook its first mission of the Battle of Britain. From its home base at Denain, this unit would fly to a forward airfield near the French coast for operations against England. St. Omer-Arques was used initially, but from 11 August Calais-Marck became the unit's jumping-off base for operations. The Gruppe's first action was against two convoys near the mouth of the Thames. Without interception from RAF fighters, the unit claimed hits on a total of 20,000 tons of shipping, and all aircraft returned to France. *V.(Z)/LG 1* was also in action, escorting reconnaissance *Do 17*s to the English coast, and being intercepted in the process. One loss and two damaged was the return for this incursion.

There was a lull in operations for a few days, but on 21 July RAF Intelligence was able to get its hands on the relatively rare 'C-5' reconnaissance version of the *Bf 110*. 5F+CM, with *Oblt.* Friedrich-Karl Runde and *Bordfunker Fw.* Willi Baden on board. They were shot down by Red Section of 238 Squadron after an eventful flight over southern England during which they shot down a Hawker Hart and a Fairey Battle.




*ABOVE*: On 24 July 1940 Uffz. Paul Hermann of 2. Staffel became the first pilot of Erpr. Gr. 210 to be killed in action. As a mark of honour to him, one aircraft of 2. Staffel had his name inscribed above the unit emblem. Note the angle of dive painted on the port side windscreen, and the mascot just visible inside the cockpit.

*ABOVE*: The same aircraft as that shown opposite after an unknown pilot effected a good belly-landing. Unfortunately, the full unit code cannot be seen.

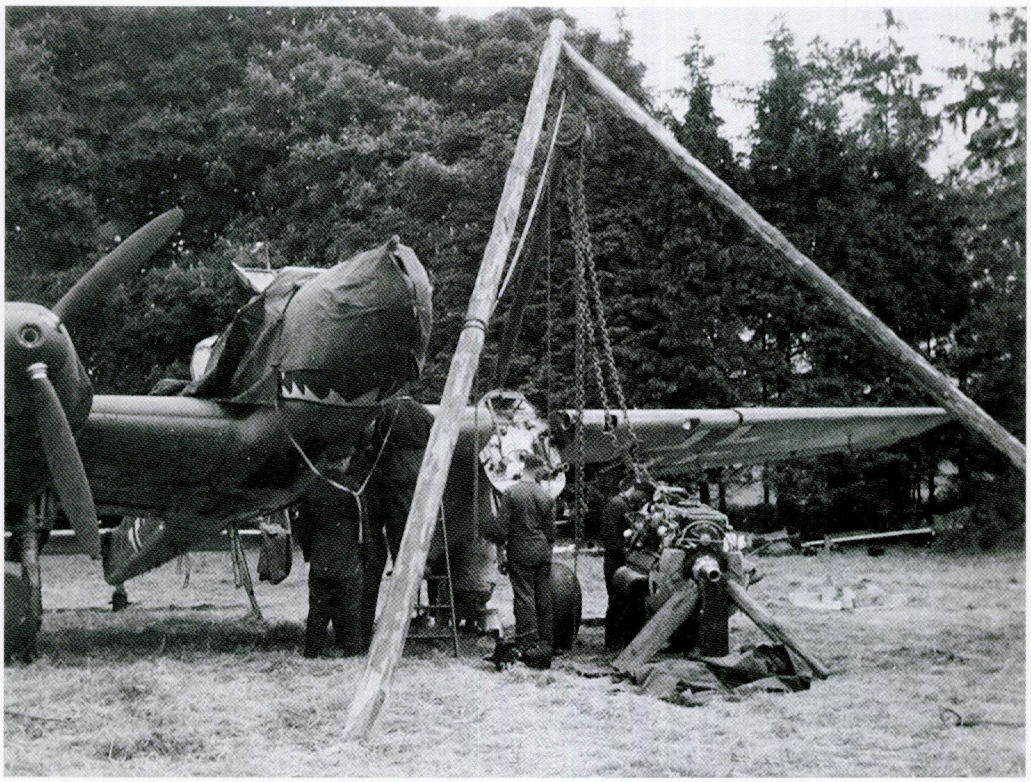
Repaired with parts taken from Gerhard Kadow's 2N+EP, it would be test flown by the RAE at Farnborough. Meanwhile *Erpr. Gr. 210* had continued its raids against coastal shipping, and on this day the crew of *Oblt.* Alfred Habisch and *Uffz.* Ernst Elfner of *2. Staffel* counted 78 hits on their aircraft and suffered a collapsed starboard undercarriage upon landing back in France after one such sortie.

In the following days the two *Bf 110* losses occurred in *Erpr. Gr. 210*. On 24 July, while attacking a convoy, the *2. Staffel* fighter-bomber of *Uffz.* Paul Hermann and his *Bordfunker Uffz.* Heinz Meinhardt received a direct hit from AA fire from the convoy it was attacking and plunged into the North Sea east of Harwich. As a mark of respect for the first pilot of the unit to be killed in action, the name '*Uffz.* Hermann' was inscribed above the unit emblem of one of *2. Staffel's* machines. The same *Staffel* suffered another loss on 27 July when, once again on a shipping strike, the *Bf 110 D-0* of *Oblt.* Franz Fallenbacher received a direct hit from AA fire, and, with its bombs still attached, blew up in the air. By the end of 27 July, *Erpr. Gr. 210* claimed to have sunk 80,000 tons of British shipping in the two weeks it had been operational.

The remaining daylight casualties for the *Zerstörer* units to the end of July rested with *Erpr. Gr. 210*, which, throughout July, was almost certainly the most active *Zerstörer* unit in the *Luftwaffe's* armoury. On 29 July the unit's fighter-bombers attacked the convoy 'Cat', escorted by three *Bf 110 C-6*s of *1. Staffel* and 30 *Bf 110*s from *ZG 26*. Attacked by 151 Squadron, the C-6 of *Lt.* Erich Beudel and his *Bordfunker Ogefr.* Heinrich Diemer took the full force of an attack by one of the Hurricanes. On this occasion Beudel managed to get his damaged machine, 2N+RH, back to St. Omer-Arques. On the following day, two C-6s of *1. Staffel* conducted an armed reconnaissance patrol over the North Sea. Having found the convoy 'Pilot' and attacked it, they were in turn attacked by F/Lt. Hamilton and Sgt. Allard of 85 Squadron. In the combat that followed, *Lt.* Hans Herold and his *Bordfunker* were shot down into the North Sea and posted as missing. The other *Bf 110 C-6*, piloted by *1. Staffel's Kapitän, Oblt.* Martin Lutz, managed to return to France. Thus ended a month of somewhat varied success for the *Zerstörer* units. A month that saw, however, the Admiralty prohibiting its destroyers from patrolling the Channel in daylight. An acknowledgement, perhaps, of the potency of the shipping attacks in the first weeks of this latest campaign.

*ABOVE*: A Bf 110 C-6 of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210, 2N+RH. This aircraft was flown on an attack against shipping by Lt. Erich Beudel on 29 July 1940 and was damaged in combat with Hurricanes from 151 Squadron. Beudel managed to belly-land back in France with a wounded Bordfunker, Obgefr. Heinrich Diemer, on board. The 'R' is blue, outlined in white. Note the unit emblem on the forward fuselage. Note also the lack of a central rear Bordfunker's panel, which has been completely removed, a common feature of Erpr. Gr. 210 Bf 110s.

*RIGHT*: Walter Rubensdörffer, Gruppen-kommandeur of Erpr. Gr. 210, extreme right, chats with Albert Kesselring, Commanding Officer of Luftflotte 2, third from right during the latter's visit to the unit on 30 July 1940. The 30 mm Kanone on one of the unit's Bf 110 C-6s can be seen to the right.

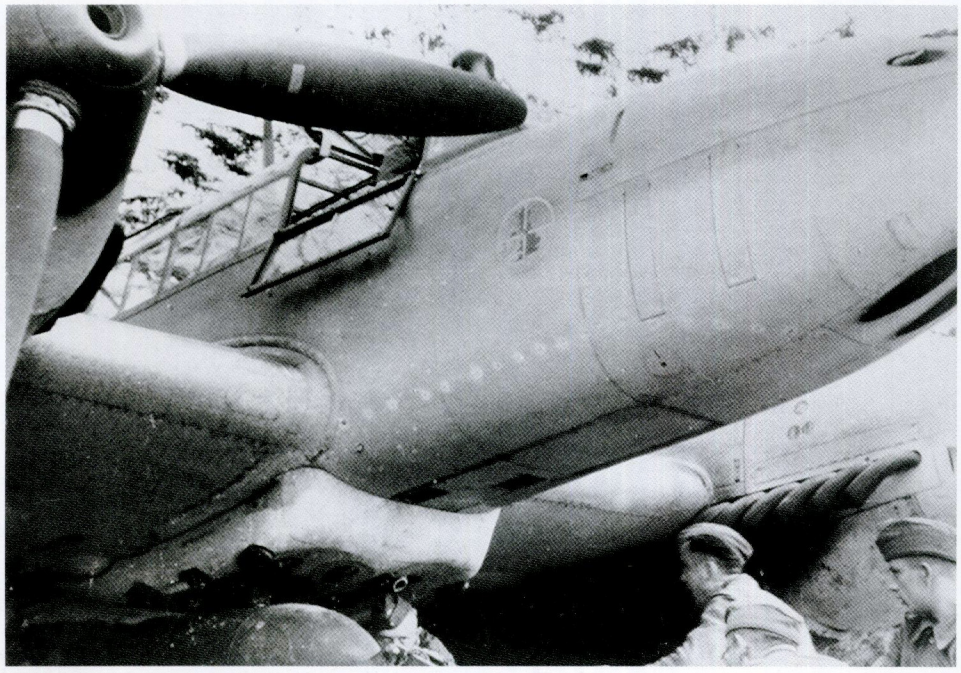


*LEFT*: Mechanics work on the port engine of this Bf 110 C of 5./ZG 76. With no other engine in sight it is likely that the it has been removed to carry out maintenance work on it, or the engine bay, rather than a complete engine change taking place. Of interest is the fact that this machine does not carry the individual aircraft letter of the aircraft within the Staffel under the port wing, as was the norm.

*LEFT*: M8+KN of 5./ZG 76 parked by the perimeter track of an unidentified airfield.

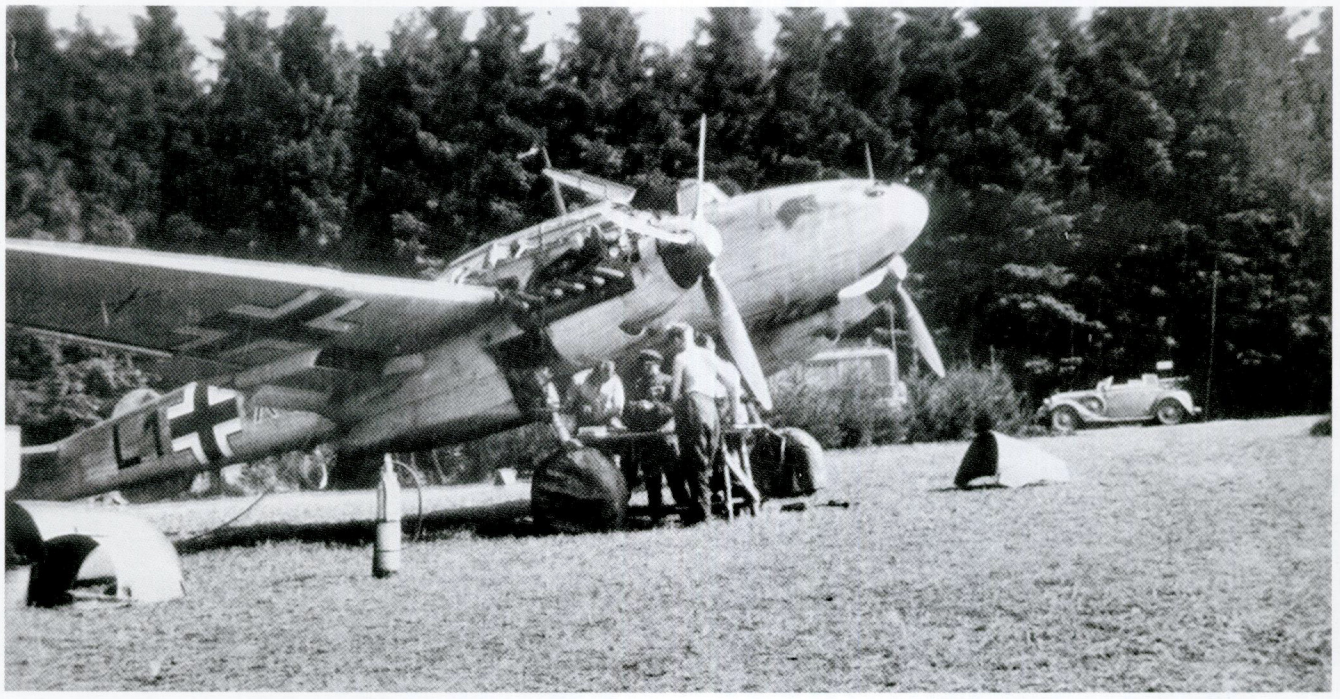
*BELOW*: This Sharksmouth is in a collection place for damaged/to be scrapped aircraft. Note the Bf 109 in the far distance and the light aircraft behind the Bf 110's fuselage.

*BELOW*: Excellent view of a bomb being fitted by ground crew to a Bf 110 D of Erpr. Gr. 210. The unit emblem can be clearly seen, as can the rivet line on the lower forward fuselage which follows exactly the line of the Dackelbauch fitment. It is almost certain that at one time a Dackelbauch had been fitted, and removed to install a bomb rack for this fighter-bomber unit.



*ABOVE*: A ground mechanic fits a panel back onto the underside of the nose of a Bf 110 fighter-bomber of Erpr. Gr. 210. The unit emblem and bomb rack can be seen, and a bomb awaits fitment beneath the aircraft.

*BELOW*: Uffz. Balthasar Aretz sits on the port wheel of this Bf 110 D freshly delivered to 2. Staffel, Erprobungsgruppe 210. The demarcation between the upper and lower surface camouflage on the forward fuselage follows closely the shape of the Dackelbauch fitment. This could possibly indicate that at the factory assembly stage the camouflage was applied in the expectation that this machine would carry the under-fuselage fuel tank, but was ultimately fitted with bomb racks. Note the name 'Jaguar' on the nose, a propaganda name given to bomb-carrying Bf 110s.



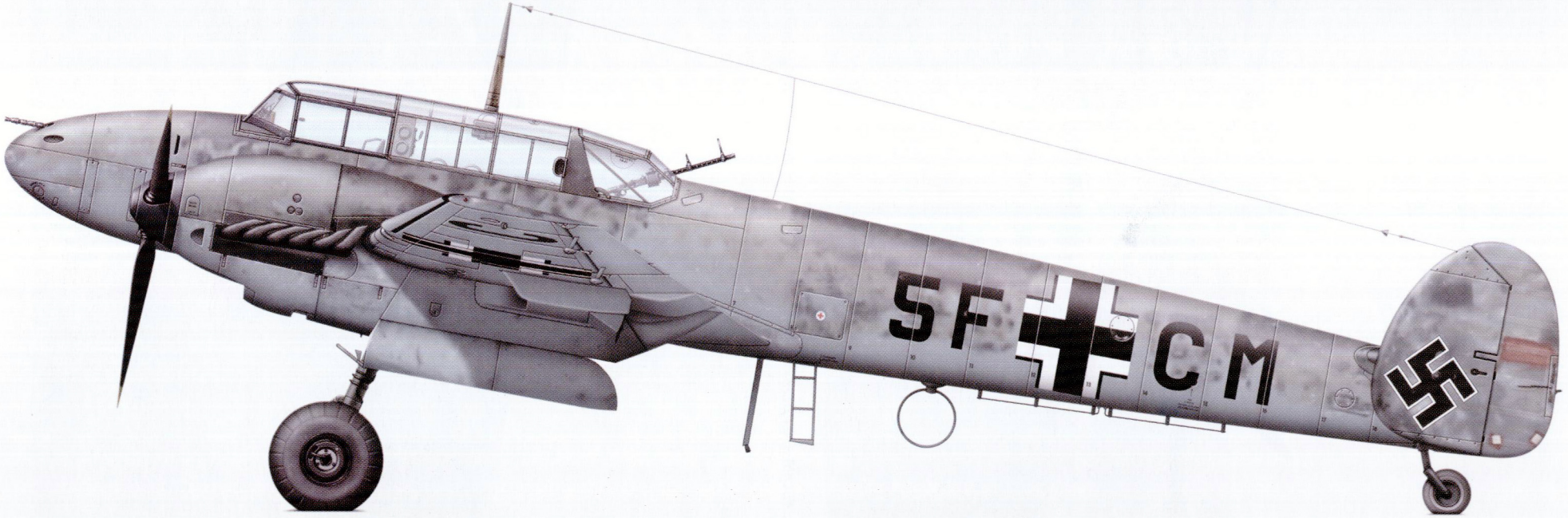

*ABOVE*: The Bf 110 C of Hptm Horst Liensberger, Gruppenkommandeur of V.(Z)/LG 1. This aircraft appears to have been given a light wash of the undersurface blue colour to the fuselage sides. The individual aircraft letter 'X' can be seen under the starboard wing, and the Gruppe emblem of a wolf's head appears to have been crudely painted around.

*RIGHT*: Bf 110 Cs L1+XB and L1+YB of the Gruppenstab of V.(Z)/LG 1 can be seen, with 3M+AA of the Geschwaderkommodore of ZG 2, Obstlt. Friedrich Vollbracht in the background.

*ABOVE*: This reconnaissance Bf 110 C-5 from 4.(F)/14 displays heavy mottling on the fuselage sides and on both inside and outside of the fins and rudders. Of particular interest is the high contrast between the two colours applied to the upper wing surfaces, engine cowlings and the fuselage spine, almost certainly RLM 71 and 02.

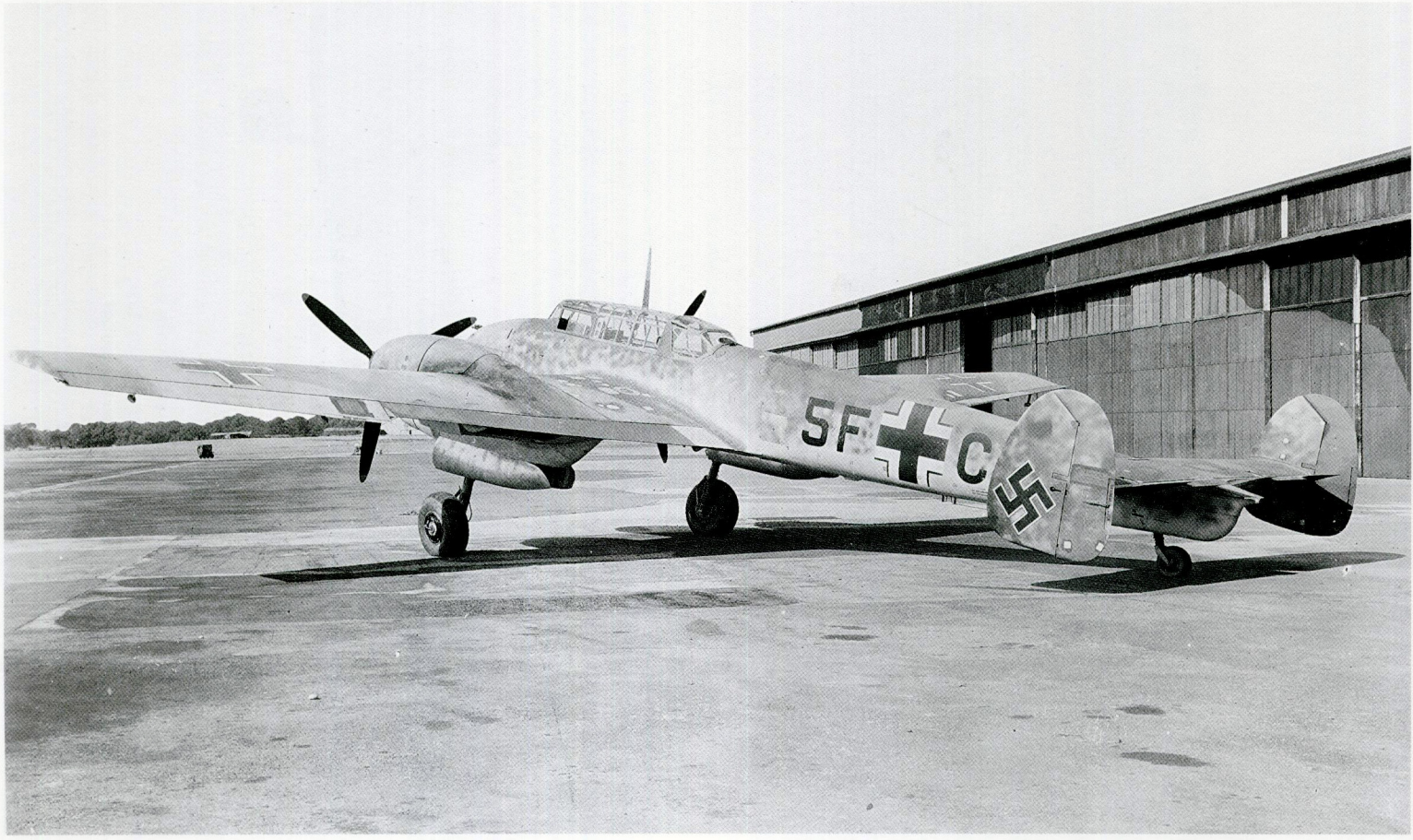
*BELOW*: The 'Baron Munchhausen' emblem can be seen on this Bf 110 C-5 of the reconnaissance unit 4.(F)/14. Note the heavy mottle down the fuselage sides and on both engine cowlings, as in the previous photograph.

*BELOW:* This Bf 110 C-5, 5F+CM, W. Nr. 2177, of 4.(F)/14 was shot down by Red Section of 238 Squadron on 21 July 1940. Oblt. Friedrich-Karl Runde managed to put it down in relatively good condition and parts from 2N+EP, the machine of Oblt Gerhard Kadow of 9./ZG 76, were used to get 5F+CM back to flying condition for comparative tests against RAF fighters. Note the heavy mottle on the fuselage sides of this aircraft also.

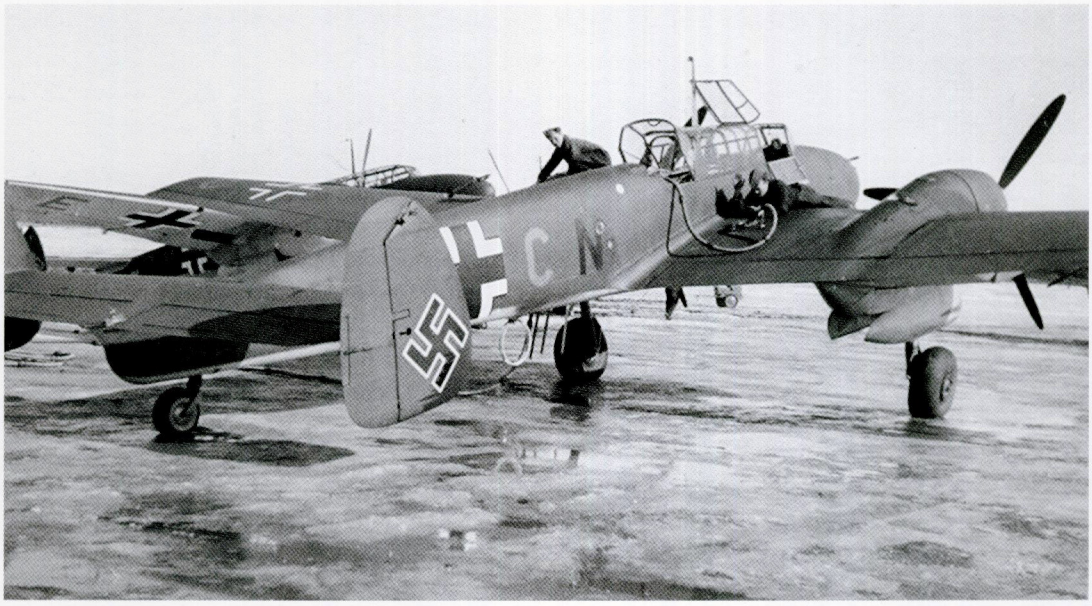



**Messerschmitt Bf 110 C-5 of 4.(F)/14**

**This reconnaissance Bf 110 C-5 was the first to fall into British hands showing the revised fuselage camouflage of lighter sides with an irregular mottle. The camouflage appears to be two greys, perhaps the earliest known example of such colours being used on a Bf 110. Note that the individual aircraft letter 'C' is not in the normal Staffel colour for 4. Staffel – white, but is in black. Note also the small section of the port rudder painted in primer.**




*ABOVE AND BELOW*: Two views of 5F+CM restored to flying condition for flight testing.



*LEFT*: 2N+CN of 8./ZG 76 having its wing fuel tanks replenished. This aircraft has the initial style Bordfunker's central enclosed panel, which required it to be partially opened for the Bordfunker to swing the machine gun into the firing position. The individual aircraft letter 'C' is in red and unusually, it is also in red on the top surface of the port wing.

## August

The early days of August saw little combat activity; the main event to take place was the equipping of *1. Staffel, Erpr. Gr. 210* with fighter-bomber *Bf 110 D-0/B*s. Conversion training to the use of the *Bf 110* as a fighter-bomber then took place for crews who had previously flown the 30 mm cannon-armed C-6 variant. *2. Staffel* suffered the loss of two aircraft on 6 August: one was lost when it was pulled out of its dive too late during dive-bombing practice and crashed with the loss of both crewmen, and the other, on a test flight to check a repaired faulty engine, was abandoned by its crew when engine problems arose once more. In the latter aircraft the *Bordfunker's* position was occupied by an engineer from Daimler-Benz to monitor engine performance; he baled out safely. The pilot, *Uffz.* Heinrich Schultheis, baled out but hit the frame of the aircraft and was killed.

*ABOVE*: Pilots Fw. Gerhard Jentzsch (left) of 13.(Z)/LG 1 and Fw. Friedrich Lindemann of 14.(Z)/LG 1. Jentzsch was killed in action on 8 August in L1+EH; Lindemann suffered the same fate in L1+CK on 27 September.

### 8 August – Convoy 'Peewit'

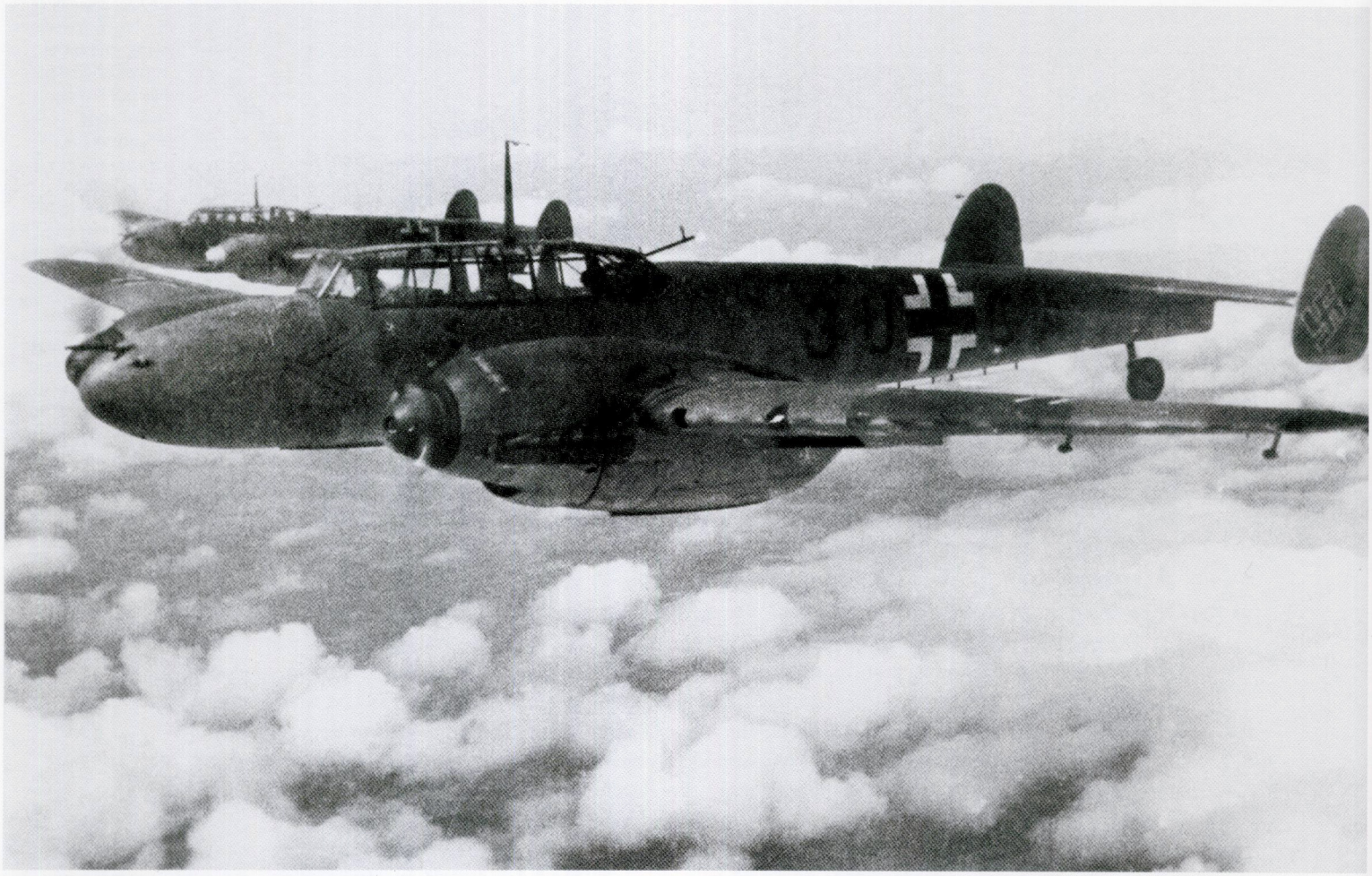
Leaving Southend on 7 August, convoy 'Peewit' was closely monitored by reconnaissance aircraft and was first attacked by German surface boats in the early hours of 8 August. The first attack on the convoy, shortly after 09:00 hours, was met with spirited opposition by defending RAF fighters. A second attack was launched in the early afternoon on the convoy, which had already suffered losses from the morning assault. On this occasion, fighter escort for the bombers was provided by the *Bf 110*s of *V.(Z)/LG 1*. Once again they tangled with intercepting British fighters, and once again their claims for victories were somewhat optimistic: 13. A feature of their claims was that they were all scored at low-level, between 500 and 1,000 metres. Set against that, *14. Staffel* lost one *Bf 110* and crew, with a further five returning to France with varying degrees of damage, one of whose pilots succumbed to his wounds.

### 11 August – central Channel and Thames estuary

Action early on 11 August involved the *Bf 109*s of *3./Erpr. Gr. 210* shooting down barrage balloons protecting Dover Harbour, and the *Bf 110*s of that unit then following up and bombing the harbour. All aircraft returned safely to Calais-Marck.

Later in the morning two major raids built up, both featuring *Bf 110*s, and the RAF reacted in strength to each of them. Heading out of the Cherbourg Peninsula towards the Dorset coast, the *Luftwaffe* formation was tracked by British radar. Both *Gruppen* of *ZG 2* provided the fighter escort along with *Bf 109*s of *JG 2* and *JG 27* for *Ju 88*s and *He 111*s drawn from *KG 54* and *KG 27* respectively. Eight RAF squadrons rose to meet what was the largest raid yet to be sent against England.

Arriving at their holding point, the *Bf 110*s formed a large defensive circle to draw the RAF fighters away from the incoming bombers. The ruse worked, and soon a heavy dogfight developed between the Spitfires and Hurricanes and the *Bf 110*s of ZG 2. This was sufficient for the bombers to get through



*ABOVE*: 3U+CA, a Bf 110 D of the Geschwaderstab of ZG 26. Note the single chevron on the forward fuselage, which is in outline only. The individual aircraft letter of 'C' is in the Geschwaderstab colour of blue.

to their allotted target, the oil storage tanks at Portland, which they duly hit. The consequences, however, were that fighter losses on both sides were relatively heavy. The *Geschwaderstab* of *ZG 2* lost *Oblt.* Günther Hensel, who was shot down into the Channel and posted missing, and *Oblt.* Wilhelm Schaefer, who ditched into the Channel and was picked up by the German air-sea rescue service. *I Gruppe* lost four aircraft into the Channel, with a further four returning to France damaged. Among the *I. Gruppe* losses was *Kommandeur* Major Ernst Ott. *Hptm.* Hans-Peter Külbel, *Staffelkapitän* of *2. Staffel*, was appointed acting *Gruppenkommandeur. II. Gruppe* fared better on this occasion, losing only one machine with another returning to base damaged. As was the case whenever combat involving large numbers of aircraft took place, combat claims submitted far exceeded the actual losses of the other side. *ZG 2* alone claimed 17 victories, which, taken with the claims of *JG 2* and *JG 27*, would be far more than the actual RAF fighter return of 15 losses and 9 damaged. However, overclaiming was endemic in all fighter forces. As this raid closed, another, further east, was preparing to take off for the Thames Estuary.

The target was convoy 'Booty' off the Essex coast, and *Erpr. Gr. 210* was tasked to carry out the attack on the convoy in concert with a formation of *Dornier 17*s from *Kampfgeschwader 2 (KG 2)*, with escort provided by *I. Gruppe* of *ZG 26*. This would be the first mission that *1./Erpr. Gr. 210* would undertake with 'fighter-bomber' *Bf 110*s, having taken on charge their first batch only a few days earlier in the month and having put the *1. Staffel* fighter crews through a quick training programme in lining up a target and dropping bombs on it in a shallow dive. Four *Bf 110 C-6*s also flew on this mission. The raiding force was able to attack the convoy before the RAF fighters intercepted, a mixed force of Hurricanes from 17 and 85 Squadrons and Spitfires from 74 Squadron. In the furious combat that followed *Erpr. Gr. 210* lost two *Bf 110 C-6*s from *1. Staffel*, all four crewmen being posted as 'missing', records subsequently being amended to 'killed in action'. *1. Staffel, ZG 26*, also lost two aircraft, with a further two *Bf 110*s from *2. Staffel, ZG 26* managing to get back to France with combat damage. Among the two losses suffered by *1./ZG 26* was the *Bf 110* of *Staffelkapitän Hptm.* Johann Kogler, who was to spend some days in the waters of the North Sea before being rescued by the efficient German air-sea rescue service.

# A Zerstörer pilot's Battle of Britain

## Wilhelm Schaefer, ZG 2

*ABOVE*: Pilot Wilhelm Schaefer, shown here during his time with II./JG 142. On the early Bf 109 behind him his personal emblem of a single yellow lightning flash can be seen.

Wilhelm Schaefer was already an experienced pilot by the time he entered the Battle of Britain. Previously with *Zerstörergeschwader* 26 with his senior officer, *Oberstleutnant* Friedrich Vollbracht, he moved to *Zerstörergeschwader* 2 when Vollbracht was posted to that unit as Commanding Officer of the *Geschwader*. Schaefer took up post as Adjutant to Vollbracht.

On 11 August 1940 a large force of Messerschmitt Bf 110s flew escort to a bomber formation headed for Portland. Schaefer describes this eventful mission:

"On this day, shortly before 10 a.m., all of the available Me 110s of I. and II. *Gruppen* of *Zerstörergeschwader* 2 formed up over the Cherbourg peninsula to escort a large formation of Junkers 88s and Heinkel 111s on an attack on the southern English port of Portland.

"Altogether there were more than 150 aircraft flying towards Portland, of which 60 were Messerschmitts. After arriving at the target they (the Messerschmitts) formed an '*Abwehrkreis*' (defensive circle) above the bombers, thus allowing them to complete their task: to destroy the fuel installations in the harbour.

"In this way the Me 110s attracted the full force of the English attack consisting of 74 Spitfires and Hurricanes flying above them. The German fighters lost six aircraft in this attack.

"I'll now supplement this with my own personal experience. The '*Stab*' (Staff Flight) machines of ZG 2, flown by *Geschwaderkommodore Oberstleutnant* Friedrich Vollbracht, and *Geschwaderadjutant Oberleutnant* Wilhelm Schaefer with *Bordfunker Oberleutnant* de Wilde, flew this mission with the Staff Flight of I. *Gruppe, Zerstörergeschwader* 2 under *Major* Ott.

"Within this formation I flew on the left side of the *Kommodore's* machine. When the English aircraft attacked, a Hurricane from the right got into position right behind him. I got into a good firing position and, with a smoking engine, he dived steeply downwards.

"After a combat lasting about an hour, I flew alongside the Kommodore as the whole unit headed for the French coast. We had just passed the midway point in the Channel when there was an explosion behind me. My oxygen system had failed and a glance behind me showed that my *Bordfunker, Oberleutnant* de Wilde, had been wounded. Because I couldn't work out the cause of the explosion – Flak? Enemy fighter? Ammunition exploding? – I set the aircraft into a low dive over the Channel.

"At this moment there was a second explosion. The cockpit canopy and other parts blew away. I felt I had been wounded in the head and arms. *Oblt*. de Wilde appeared badly wounded. The plane dived at high speed towards the water. At this stage, I still hoped that we could reach the French coast, to be able to help *Oblt*. de Wilde, should he still be alive. Baling out was out of the question.

"In order to reduce the speed of the aircraft, I put the propellers into 'dive'. They had, however, been damaged by the second explosion, so I was diving almost vertically towards the water. It was the worst moment in my life up to that point. With all my strength I succeeded in coming out of the dive a few metres above the water. Because of the damaged propellers straight flight was not possible, so I decided at the last minute to land on the water. Standard instructions for such a landing in an Me 110 were somewhat vague. The pilot was advised to release the cockpit canopy, unharness himself, to avoid collision with the dashboard, and roll forward out of the cockpit. In my case the Me 110 didn't respond in the standard way. It landed on a swell, the canopy was open, and I was free from my harness. I didn't roll out of the cockpit, however, but hit my head on the dashboard. How long I remained unconscious, I do not know. When I came to, however, most of the aircraft was already under water. A quick glance into the *Bordfunker's* position showed me that nothing more could be done. *Oblt*. De Wilde was dead.

"I jumped into the sea and immediately sank like a stone because I hadn't released my parachute. Luckily I was able to do this as I sank. When I came to the surface once more, the aircraft had gone under, together with de Wilde. I can't describe my feelings at that time.

"All was not lost. I noticed a few metres away the coloured marker which was standard equipment for flights over water, and which had broken off on impact. It would be a life-saver since it marked with a yellow/green light the place of 'landing' so that I might be saved.

"The rescue operation ran almost like a fairy tale. A son of *Generalfeldmarschall* von Blomberg, *Major* Axel von Blomberg, was standing at this time on the cliffs near Cherbourg and saw through his binoculars an aircraft returning from England and falling into the sea, then disappearing. He registered the direction and distance (about 25 kilometres) on his map and then drove in his car to the nearest fighter airfield in order to put into operation a rescue plan. The Me 109s stationed there had returned shortly before the battle and had to be refuelled and made ready for the next mission. The Station Commander was not particularly keen on the proposed plan but eventually agreed to it.

"In the meantime I swam for almost four hours in the Channel, always under the false impression that I could reach the French coast. I didn't know that the Gulf Stream was taking me in the opposite direction! During this long period many German aircraft flew overhead, though not one gave me any recognition. As I felt the onset of tiredness, together with a bullet wound in my upper left arm that was becoming increasingly painful, I suddenly heard the noise of engines and three Me 109s flew directly towards me. They waggled their wings – a sign of recognition – and one flew off back while the other two remained in formation near me. After another half hour or so a German maritime emergency aircraft, a Heinkel 59, arrived from its base in Cherbourg. It landed nearby and rescued me from the water.

"The cold had got to me so much that I was unable to climb onto the raft of the He 59 without help. I had to be hauled into the cabin. Someone gave me a schnapps to drink and I was then informed that I might have to jump back into the water if they couldn't start the engines; they weren't in 100 per cent working order!

*continued overleaf*

"In spite of a happy landing in Cherbourg I was taken to the local hospital to 'thaw out' and then, the next day, was brought before the Kommodore, since I had been reported as 'missing' the previous day. That day, once again at my unit's base at St. Aubin, the story of my shooting down was broadcast live on German radio and heard by my family back home.

"A few days later I had the opportunity to thank personally Major Axel von Blomberg for his help. For me, the rescue came out of a no-hope situation.

"Oberleutnant de Wilde had made a particular request to fly on that mission of 11 August 1940. His fate was particularly sad for me."

Wilhelm Schaefer did not fly again until 4 September 1940. This was another eventful flight, which he describes thus:

"On the evening of 3 September the mission orders of the Geschwaderstab of Zerstörergeschwader 2 for the following day, Wednesday 4 September, were issued. As well as the Kommodore, Oberstleutnant Friedrich Vollbracht, and myself as Geschwaderadjutant, the Gruppenkommandeuren of I. and II. Gruppen of ZG 2 were in attendance. Our base was Berck-sur-Mer on the Normandy coast, south of Boulogne.

"Both Gruppen had been detailed to fly escort to bomber formations. The targets were aircraft industry works in the south-west and west of London.

I was not down to fly this mission, as my aircraft had been shot down into the Channel on 11 August between Portland and Cherbourg, and a replacement still had not arrived.

"On the morning of 4 September, as the aircraft of I. Gruppe were started up, and II. Gruppe were moving to their take-off position, the Geschwaderkommodore suddenly gave me the 'green light' to take part in the mission in his machine, in his place.

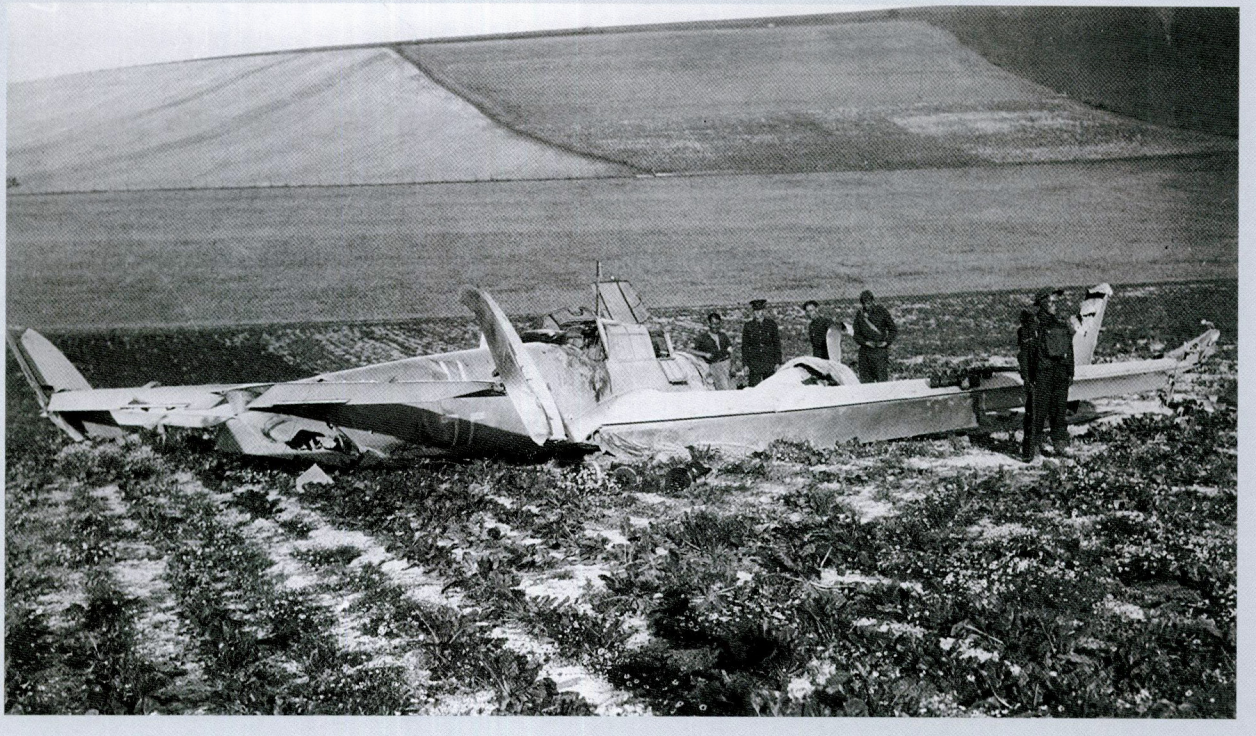
"With my Bordfunker, Unteroffizier Heinz Bendjus, I arrived at the airfield ten minutes later, and found that the Kommodore's machine had one wing uncovered. As both Gruppen had already taken off there was no time to warm up the engines. Already, on take-off, there were problems, as the tail unit was malfunctioning and the cold engine was not functioning properly.

"I was not successful in my hope of catching up the rest of my unit before the English coast was reached, and so my flight was a solo effort to England…

From afar I could see that the Me 110s were caught up in a heavy dogfight. Although my left engine was still not functioning fully, I hoped in the meantime to link up with my Geschwader on the return flight. As a result of my stuttering engine I was neither high enough nor fast enough to catch up with my returning Geschwader and shortly afterwards was attacked by several Spitfires. As my chances in the forthcoming combat were slim, I took my first chance to dive towards the coast – that was a mistake. As I flew over the coast, coming towards me from the Channel were two English fighters that immediately engaged me in a low-level combat. Fired at from both sides, but without success, I was hoping that they would soon have to break off combat due to low fuel, when a third fighter appeared above me in a firing position, and turning, the full side of my Messerschmitt presented a good target. In spite of several hits, I was still able to control the aircraft, until the left engine failed and I could no longer do so. In order not to crash in flames, I shut off both engines, and carried out a belly-landing in a meadow. The place of the force-landing was Mill Hill, Shoreham Downs; the time was 13:50 hours on 4 September 1940. With that, the active war service for my Bordfunker and myself ended.

"I myself was not wounded, Unteroffizier Bendjus was slightly wounded. Our aim to set our aircraft on fire was not to be. We were soon 'greeted' by Home Guard, and transported into captivity in a nearby village. On the way we were met by an English officer pilot, who claimed to have shot us down. He apologised for not being able to take us for a drink in the officers' mess with him.

The wife of the village policeman, in whose kitchen we spent the first night, provided us with hot tea, toast, fish and sausage, for which I am thankful even to this day. Unfortunately I don't have the names of these wonderful people, so I wasn't able to contact them post-war.



*RIGHT*: Also brought down on 4 September was 3M+AA flown by Oblt. Wilhelm Schaefer, Geschwaderadjutant of ZG 2, with Uffz. Heinz Bendjus as Bordfunker. The 'A' was the normal mount of the Geschwader-kommodore, Obstlt. Friedrich Vollbracht, who allowed Schaefer to fly his machine on this day.

## 12 August – RDF stations, central south coast, Manston & Hawkinge

On what was to be its busiest day of the Battle of Britain, *Erpr. Gr. 210* took off from Calais-Marck around 09:30 hours on 12 August to attack RDF stations dotted around the south coast of England. Heading out low over the Channel, the unit split into four formations, each with a specific target. *Gruppenkommandeur Hptm.* Walter Rubensdörffer set course for the RDF site situated in the tiny village of Dunkirk, north of Canterbury; *Oblt.* Otto Hintze led the *Bf 109 E-4/B*s of *3. Staffel* to the site at Dover; further along the coast *Oblt.* Wilhelm-Richard Roßiger led *2. Staffel* towards Rye, while *Oblt.* Martin Lutz took his *1. Staffel* to the most westerly target, Pevensey. Given the small size of the targets involved, all four formations acquitted themselves well by hitting them. The masts, however, were not toppled, and although three of the four stations were temporarily put out of action (Dunkirk was the only site to continue to function), they were all back in operation before the end of the day. All aircraft of *Erpr. Gr. 210* returned to Calais-Marck.

Towards midday, *Ju 88*s of *KG 51* turned out in force for a raid against Gosport, Portsmouth Harbour and the RDF station at Ventnor on the Isle of Wight. Among the escort fighters for this raid were the *Bf 110*s of *ZG 2* as well as *II.* and *III. Gruppen* of *ZG 76*. Once again, RAF fighters did not intercept until the bombers had completed their task. *I.* and *III./KG 51* hit Portsmouth Harbour, while *II. Gruppe* together with the *Stabsschwarm* of *KG 51* made a devastating attack on the Ventnor RDF site, putting it out of action for three days. Following the bombing, the bombers finally came under attack from RAF fighters, who exacted a toll of eight bombers shot down, including that of the *Geschwaderkommodore* of *KG 51*, *Oberst* Dr. Johann-Volkmar Fisser. Intercepting fighters also engaged the *Bf 110*s, and *I./ZG 2* lost two *Bf 110*s with a further two managing to get back to France with combat damage. One of the losses was the aircraft of acting *Gruppenkommandeur Hptm.* Hans-Peter Külbel, whose *Bf 110* crashed into the Channel off Portsmouth. Külbel's tenure as acting *Gruppenkommandeur* had lasted only one day. While lodging claims for six victories, *III./ZG 76* did not escape unscathed, *8. Staffel* losing two aircraft, including that of *Staffelkapitän*, *Hptm.* Max Graf Hoyos.

*ABOVE*: L1+AK of 14.(Z)/LG 1 on the firing butts having its guns synchronised. Note the paint used to cover the original factory codes is of a lighter shade than that on the rest of the fuselage sides. The letter 'A' is in black with apparently no outline.

Meanwhile, re-armed and re-fuelled, the *Bf 110*s and *Bf 109*s of *Erpr. Gr. 210* took off from Calais-Marck and headed for Manston airfield on the south-eastern tip of Kent. On the way they were joined by *Dornier 17*s of *KG 2*, and the complete formation made its run-in to the target unopposed. The Manston Operations Record Book recorded 100 craters on the airfield, and 65 Squadron managed to take off as the raid was in progress, only one Spitfire not making it into the air due to its engine stalling. Heading back across the Channel, *Erpr. Gr. 210* was attacked, almost certainly by 54 Squadron Spitfires and the Hurricanes of 501 Squadron. One *Bf 110* of *1. Staffel* returned with slight damage following this interception.

Early afternoon produced a lull in proceedings, but in the late afternoon *Erpr. Gr. 210* took off again for its third mission of the day. Unescorted, it made its shortest journey of the day, diving down on Hawkinge airfield and hitting it with a precision attack. Although considerable damage was done to the airfield, it was not put out of action. All aircraft of the unit returned to Calais-Marck. Thus ended a day in which the *Bf 110*s of various units had put in a major effort and suffered losses. In the case of *Erpr. Gr. 210* it was a day that would prove to be the most successful in its history. '*Adlertag*', upon which the *Luftwaffe* High Command placed so much importance, would follow: the springboard for the *Luftwaffe* to achieve the ultimate defeat of the RAF.

## 13 August – 'Adlertag'

'*Adlertag*', 13 August, got off to the worst possible start when, due to unsettled weather conditions, all morning attacks were cancelled. However, in one of the more notable *Luftwaffe* raids of the Battle of Britain, communications went awry and although the recall order reached the *Bf 110* escort from *ZG 26*, *Oberst* Fink's *Do 17*s from *KG 2* did not receive any such order. Frantic attempts by the *Zerstörer* crews to alert the *Do 17* crews that they should return proved fruitless and the Dorniers continued to head for their target. Sticking rigidly to their orders, *ZG 26* returned to base, leaving *KG 2* to press on alone.

# 'K' Reports

During the Battle of Britain, RAF Intelligence Sections gathered information from a number of sources. At the time, this information was considered of paramount importance, since the threat of invasion was a real fear for the British authorities. Anything that could provide an accurate picture of the enemy's resources was vital. Information was circulated in the form of summaries, which are now in the public domain. The following copies of summaries for Erprobungsgruppe 210 give a flavour of the kind of information RAF Intelligence Sections were gathering. What can be seen is the fact that they did not know the exact title of the unit, and on one occasion had to query the source information due to duplication (initial on-site reports for 27 September give Bf 110s piloted by Fw. Fritz Ebner and Hptm. Martin Lutz the same fuselage code, S9+DK. Clarification later showed that Ebner indeed flew the '+DK', while Lutz was in '+DH'). It is interesting to read that telephone communications were problematic for the intelligence section! Also, in the case of Martin Lutz's aircraft, the blue individual aircraft letter (a unique feature of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210 machines) led the section to believe the full code was S9+DA, blue being the usual colour for Geschwaderstab letters, and therefore 'A' (the Geschwader identifier) being the last letter. A logical deduction, but wrong in this case. With the passage of time, these summaries provided a unique insight into what was going on behind the scenes as front-line RAF squadrons locked horns with their Luftwaffe counterparts.

SECRET. A.I.1 (k) Report No. 255/1940.

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION HAS BEEN OBTAINED FROM P/W. AS THE STATEMENTS MADE HAVE NOT AS YET BEEN VERIFIED, NO MENTION OF THEM SHOULD BE MADE IN INTELLIGENCE SUMMARIES OF COMMANDS OR LOWER FORMATIONS, NOR SHOULD THEY BE ACCEPTED AS FACTS UNTIL COMMENTED ON IN AIR MINISTRY INTELLIGENCE SUMMARIES OR SPECIAL COMMUNICATIONS.

PLACE, DATE and TIME: Manston Aerodrome, Kent. 14/8/40. 1210 hours.

TYPE and MARKS: Me.110. S9 + MK. Shield, Yellow Bomb-Sight over Map of England and N. Ireland in Red, S. Ireland only outlined.

UNIT: 2/K.G.210.

IDENTITY DISC: 53585.

FELDPOSTNUMMER: L 25082.

AUSWEIS: -

START and MISSION: Started from Benain at 1130 hours, refuelled at St. Omer, to attack Manston Aerodrome. 2 x 250-kg. bombs were dropped.

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This Staffel has been at Benain Aerodrome since 10/7/40.

The present operation consisted of about 3 aircraft from the 1st Staffel, and 4 from the 2nd Staffel, with 7 Me.109's as Escort. The attack is reported as being carried out by Diving.

Just after dropping the bombs, the aircraft sustained a direct hit from a "Bofors" A.A. gun, which exploded the aircraft in the air, and wounded the W/T, who baled out.

Immediately after pulling the rip-cord of his parachute, he went unconscious, and only came-to in the Sick Ward of Manston Aerodrome.

The aircraft is badly smashed, but it appears to be in essentials a standard Me.110, with 2 bomb racks underneath the front of the fuselage, similar to those on a Ju.88. No Bomb-Sight has been found, but there is a mark on the pilot's wind-screen, which presumably serves as a Sight.

CREW:-
Pilot ..... Unteroffizier Hans STEDING. - Dead.
W/T ..... Gefreiter Ewald SCHANK. - Wounded.

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A further Me.110 crashed at Manston, marked S9 + NK. This is a complete write-off, and is burnt out.

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S.D. Pelkin
Squadron Leader.

SPECIAL DISTRIBUTION.

SECRET. 003067 A.I.1.(k) Report No. 268/1940.

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION HAS BEEN OBTAINED FROM P/W. AS THE STATEMENTS MADE HAVE NOT AS YET BEEN VERIFIED, NO MENTION OF THEM SHOULD BE MADE IN INTELLIGENCE SUMMARIES OF COMMANDS OR LOWER FORMATIONS, NOR SHOULD THEY BE ACCEPTED AS FACTS UNTIL COMMENTED ON IN AIR MINISTRY INTELLIGENCE SUMMARIES OR SPECIAL COMMUNICATIONS.

Collective Report on Various G.A.F. Losses.

1. On the attached Sheet is a further list of aircraft, identifications, etc., brought down up to 16th August.

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Kampf Gruppe 210.

2. This Gruppe was formed some time after the 10th May, the actual date of the formation having not yet been determined.

3. It was formed at Lille, some at least of the personnel having been drawn from Z.G.1.

4. Soon after its formation, probably during June, they underwent a period of training in Denmark, and during this time two Me.110's crashed when practicing dive bombing - they did not pull out soon enough.

5. At present, the Gruppe Establishment is a Gruppen Stab of 3 Me.110's, and 3 Staffeln of 9 aircraft each.

6. Staffeln 1 and 2 are equipped with Me.110's, of which 6 of the 9 aircraft have bomb-racks, and the remaining 3 are the ordinary Zerstörers. This arrangement appears to have been considered, by the Other Ranks of the Gruppe, to have provided inadequate protection for the Bombers.

7. All the Me.110's were stated to have 20 mm. cannons as standard equipment, and it appears that until their last operation, they had rather specialised in attacking Convoys in the Channel.

8. The 3rd Staffel is equipped with Me.109's. These are the ordinary Fighter version, and none of them are equipped for bomb carrying. The duties of the 3rd Staffel are principally as Escort for the Bombers, but they also have carried out "Free-Lance" patrols and in particular they rather fancy themselves as "Balloon Poppers": they were in action against the balloon barrage at Dover, one pilot saying that he always flew between the cable, and underneath the balloons.

9. All the Me.110's bear the same Shield, a map of England and Northern Ireland all in red, with the remainder of Ireland outlined in red, the whole map obscured by a yellow Ring and Cross-wire Sight.

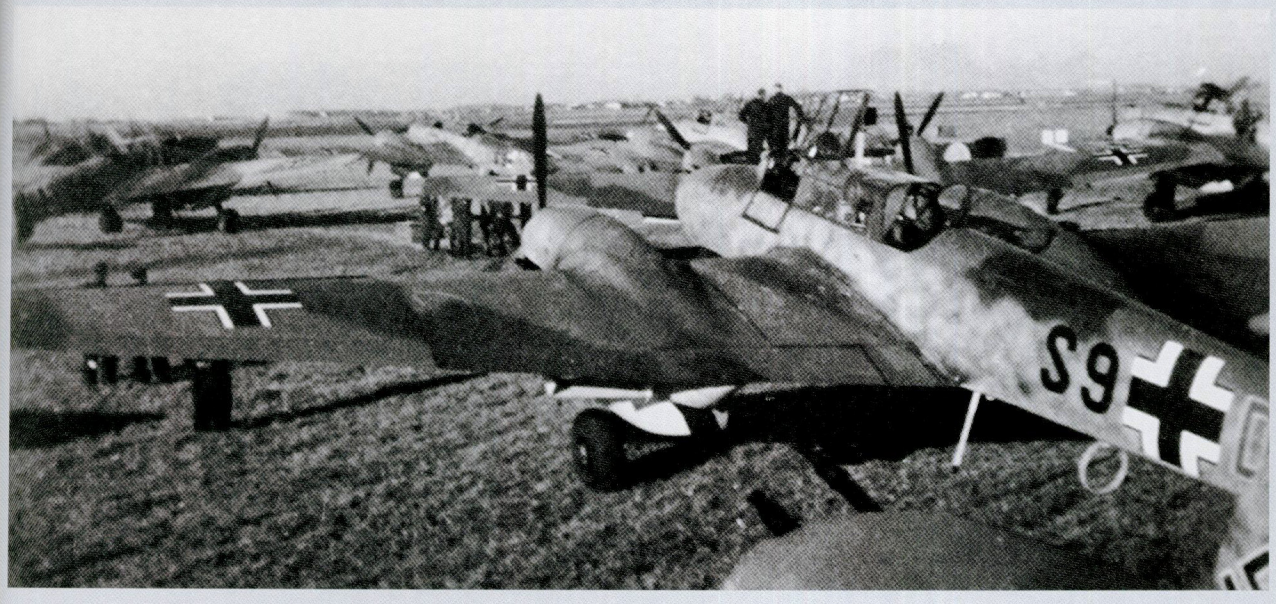
10. The Officers of the Unit, so far ascertained, are as follows:-

Gruppenkommandeur ..... Hauptmann RUBENSDORFER. (Killed 15/8/40 in S9 + AB).
Second-in-Command ..... Oberleutnant FIEDLER. (Killed 15/8/40 in S9 + BB).
3rd Staffelkapitän ..... Oberleutnant HINZE. (Flies in Me.109, + 1).

11. A further Report on this Gruppe is being prepared.

for Squadron Leader.

SPECIAL DISTRIBUTION.




*LEFT*: S9+DH, the aircraft Martin Lutz was flying when shot down on 27 September. Note the high contrast between the two upper surface camouflage colours, and the strong mottle down the fuselage sides. The individual aircraft letter 'D' is blue outlined in white, a common practise for 1. Staffel aircraft of this unit.

'Z'

44075

SECRET. A.I.1.(k) Report No. 686/1940.

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION HAS BEEN OBTAINED FROM P/W. 19.30
AS THE STATEMENTS MADE HAVE NOT AS YET BEEN VERIFIED, 3|39|3
NO MENTION OF THEM SHOULD BE MADE IN INTELLIGENCE
SUMMARIES OF COMMANDS OR LOWER FORMATIONS, NOR SHOULD
THEY BE ACCEPTED AS FACTS UNTIL COMMENTED ON IN AIR
MINISTRY INTELLIGENCE SUMMARIES OR SPECIAL COMMUNICATIONS.

Further Report on Two Me.110 Bombers, of Kampfgruppe 210, brought down in S.E. England at Noon, on 27/9/1940.

Previous Report Nos:
S9 + DK .. 649/1940.
S9 + DH .. 650/1940.

1. The lettering of the second aircraft has now been established as S9 + DH. Both members of the crew were dead, but interrogation of a man from the other aircraft, shows that the pilot was Hauptmann LUTZE who was the Kommandeur of K.Gr.210. He had previously been Staffelkapitän of the 1st Staffel, and took over the command when Hauptmann von AHRENEIN, the successor of RÜHENSDORFER, was killed. He was therefore the third Kommandeur, which this Gruppe has lost since 15/9/40.

2. The Staffelkapitäne are at present:-

1st Staffel .... Oberleutnant WEIMANN.
2nd " .... Oberleutnant RÖSIGER.
3rd " .... Oberleutnant HINTZE.

3. The morale of the Unit, judging by the latest P/W, does not appear to have suffered in spite of their losses.

4. The 3rd Staffel, which had formerly Me.109's, has ceased to act as escort, and is now equipped with Me.110 Bombers. The pilots are the same, but previously they had not been considered sufficiently experienced to fly fast twin-engined aircraft. So far there is no news that the Gruppe is being increased to a Geschwader, although it is possible that a 4th Staffel has now been added.

5. Since the middle of August, this Gruppe has transferred its activities from shipping, and now concentrates entirely on ground targets. The bomb-load is nearly always 2 x 500-kilo bombs.

6. The Gruppe has made a number of War Flights without suffering loss, which was ascribed to the fact that they are always accompanied by a strong Zerstörer escort, usually supplied by Z.G.26.

7. The operations of this Gruppe include an attack on Norwich on August 23rd or 25th; an attack on oil tanks and ships in Portland Harbour on September 25th; an attack on the Supermarine Works and hangar at Southampton on September 26th, and the last operation on September 27th, when they started from Cherbourg attacking the Parnall Aircraft Works at Yate. In the aircraft of the Kommodore, were found three maps or photographs corresponding to the last three targets. These are as follows:-

Aerial Photograph - Portland.

From note on back, and clock on front, this was taken on 25/8/40, at 1119 hours German time. Target numbers marked in:-

1036 - Aerodrome.
4511 - Inner Harbour entrance.
2210 - Junction of Northern Mole and shore.

/Target



19.30

Target Photograph - Southampton and Interpretation.

Ref: GB.4533, S.Bl.38, 376 Z 45b, Scale Ca.1:18,000 taken 5/8/40, at 1830 German time, by Leutnant BRAITENBACH of 4(F)14, interpreted by Unteroffizier BÜLOW on 11/8/40.

Red figures and interpretation give:-

1. Electrical Instrument Factory.
2. Storage Tanks. GB.2131.
3. A.A. Positions.
4. Heavy A.A. Position with 22 huts.
5. Shipyards. GB.8331.
6. Inner and Outer Harbour Basins. GB.4535.
7. 4 Dry Docks.
8. Trafalgar Dry Dock. GB.8337.
9. Dry Dock. GB.8338.
10. Main Gas Works. GB.5231.
11. 10 Barrage Balloons.
12. W/T Transmitting Station. 7432.
13. Just N. of Area 5. 7432. (Two Areas).

Basin between 6, 7 and 9 enclosed in dotted line, figure 1 and 4533.

The actual target was No. 13.

Target Map.

1:50,000, Parnall Aircraft Co. Ltd., Yate.
Ref: GB.7451a. Two areas marked.

8. In addition to these, notes on a sheet of paper in the Kommodore's aircraft outline an attack on Weybridge. The S9 + DH, which was brought down on 6/9/40, had attacked Vickers on 4th and 6th September. Eight Me.110 Bombers, each carrying two SC 500 bombs, started from Calais-Marck at 0910 hours, and flew on 248° (Magnetic) to Cap Gris Nez, where they climbed for 14 minutes, and probably assembled the escort. They left Gris Nez at 0935 hours on course of 298° for Kenley, and were due to arrive there at 1000 hours, which was zero hour. From Kenley they altered course to 286°, and were scheduled to arrive at Weybridge two minutes later. The return journey was made from Weybridge at 132° for 28 minutes, which brought the aircraft back to Boulogne.

9. In the Preliminary Report, it was mentioned that the disc of the W/T operator, of the S9 + DK, had previously been listed as 4/Stuka 77. Further interrogation has revealed that, until fairly recently, he had in fact had been a pilot in the 2nd Staffel of that Unit. His history is as follows:-

10. After 2½ years service in the German Army, he transferred in 1935 to the G.A.F., and in due course was posted to the Immelmann Geschwader, which was at that time a Fighter Unit. After he had been 12 months with this Unit, they all underwent a four months course in Stuka training, and became Sturzkampfgeschwader 77, with which he stayed until about June, when he was selected for training as an Me.110 Bomber pilot, and was posted to 2/K.Gr.210 in about July. During the time he was with Stuka 77, a number of men were split off, and went to form the nucleus of Sturzkampfgeschwader 2, which took on the name "Immelmann Geschwader" to perpetuate the name of their old Unit.

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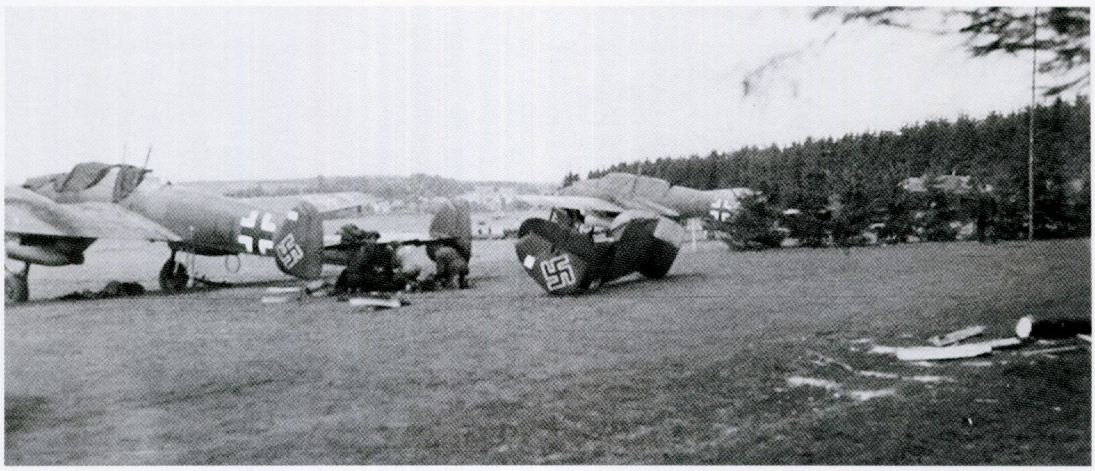
A.I.1.(k).
3. 10. 1940. USUAL DISTRIBUTION.

S. D. Felkin,
Squadron Leader.



*RIGHT*: A rare view of the complete rear section of a Bf 110 C being replaced. Note that the number of victory bars on the port fins are identical. This V.(Z)/LG 1 machine carries the early style solid camouflage down the fuselage sides with the later-style full sized fuselage cross. The individual aircraft letter on the top surface of the wing appears to be 'F'.

Things were to be no better later in the day when, towards midday, a planned raid with *V.(Z)/LG 1* taking the lead to draw off RAF fighters to allow *KG 54* to carry out an attack on Portland also miscarried. *V.(Z)/LG 1* duly carried out their allotted task, but the bombers this time received the cancellation order. Optimistically claiming nine RAF fighters destroyed (only one was in fact lost), *Hptm.* Liensberger's *Gruppe* suffered heavily, five *Bf 110*s being lost, and another five returning to France in varying states of damage.

The launch of '*Adlertag*' finally occurred around 16.00 hours in the afternoon in a series of attacks on Portland and Southampton, as well as airfields on the south coast. Mixed fortunes were suffered by the escorting fighters of *ZG 2*: *I. Gruppe* lost two *Bf 110*s whereas *II. Gruppe* suffered no casualties on this occasion. However both *Gruppen* overclaimed, again helping to add to the belief in the higher echelons of the *Luftwaffe* that the fight against the RAF was being won, in terms of shooting down enemy fighters in considerable numbers. *III./ZG 76* was also on duty in this action, up from its new forward base of Jersey. Intercepted by Hurricanes, two *Bf 110*s were lost, and the *Gruppe* had other aircraft return to Lannion in France with varying degrees of damage, including those of *Gruppenkommandeur Hptm.* Friedrich-Karl Dickoré and his wingman, the *Gruppe* Technical Officer, *Lt.* Richard Marchfelder.

Further to the east, *Erpr. Gr. 210* finally took off for an attack on Southend (Rochford) airfield, escorted by *I./ZG 26*. Weather conditions at this time of day were no better than in the morning and the mission was aborted, *Erpr. Gr. 210* releasing its bombs over Canterbury and returning to base. *I./ZG 26* became entangled with Hurricanes of 56 Squadron and, on this occasion, for the loss of one *Bf 110*, shot down four of the opposition. Others returned to France damaged, and *Lt.* Joachim Koepsell, disorientated after combat and desperately seeking a landfall, belly-landed at s'Hertogenbosch in Holland, some 265 kilometres from his base after a flight lasting two hours, forty five minutes!

'*Adlertag*' had not gone as expected, and had shown up flaws in the *Luftwaffe's* communications system. Additionally, one of the great variables in all military conflicts came into play – the weather. What should have been a day's action by the *Luftwaffe* with a major impact on turning the course of the conflict its way turned out to be a rather indifferent affair.

*BELOW*: Fw. Datz, centre, poses in front of his Bf 110 of 13.(Z)/LG 1. Note the whole of the spinner, apart from the backplate, is white. Datz was shot down into captivity on 13 August 1940.

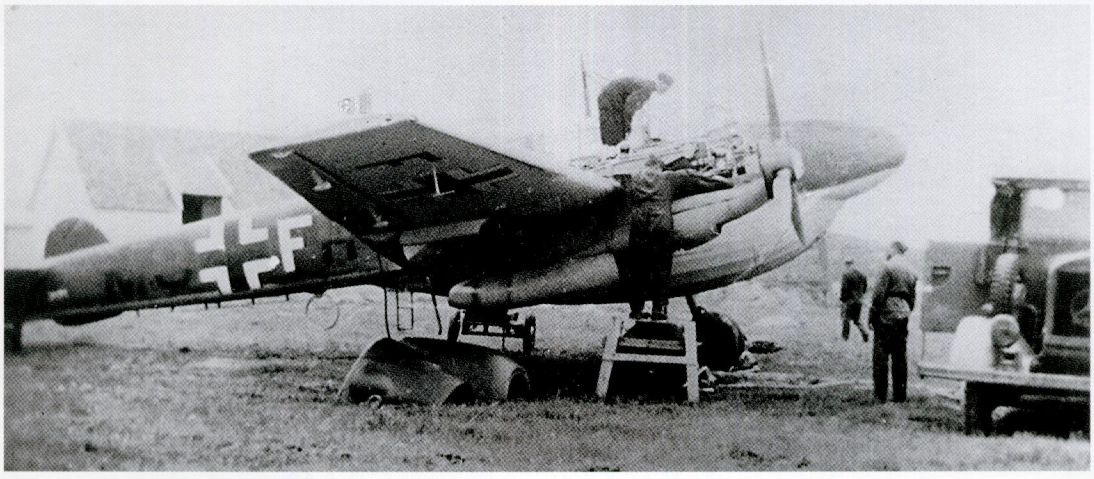
## 14 August – Manston

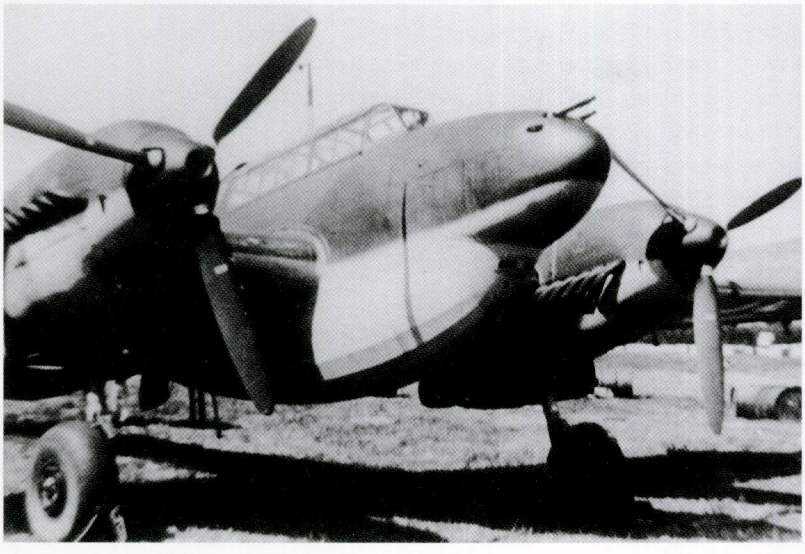
Following the exertions of the previous days, the *Luftwaffe's* response on 14 August was somewhat muted. The only action of note involved once more the *Bf 110* fighter-bombers of *Erpr. Gr. 210*. Bad weather hampered early morning operations, but towards midday the unit received the all-clear to undertake an operation. Initially *1. Staffel* was briefed to attack the small civil airfield at Ramsgate, but ultimately it joined with *2. Staffel* in attacking Manston airfield once again. On this occasion, however, the airfield defences were better prepared than two days previously, and as

both *Staffeln* dived to attack the airfield, the defences opened up. As a result, *2. Staffel* lost two aircraft, both shot down directly over the airfield and crashing on it. Miraculously, one of the four crewmen survived. *Bordfunker Gefr.* Ewald Schank extricated himself from his stricken *Bf 110* in time to deploy his parachute sufficiently to save his life. Landing among the bombs falling from his comrades' aircraft above, he was taken to the relative safety of one of the slit trenches before being transported to hospital, where he remained for 10 days. Manston airfield, however, took a hammering once again.

## 15 August – north-east coast

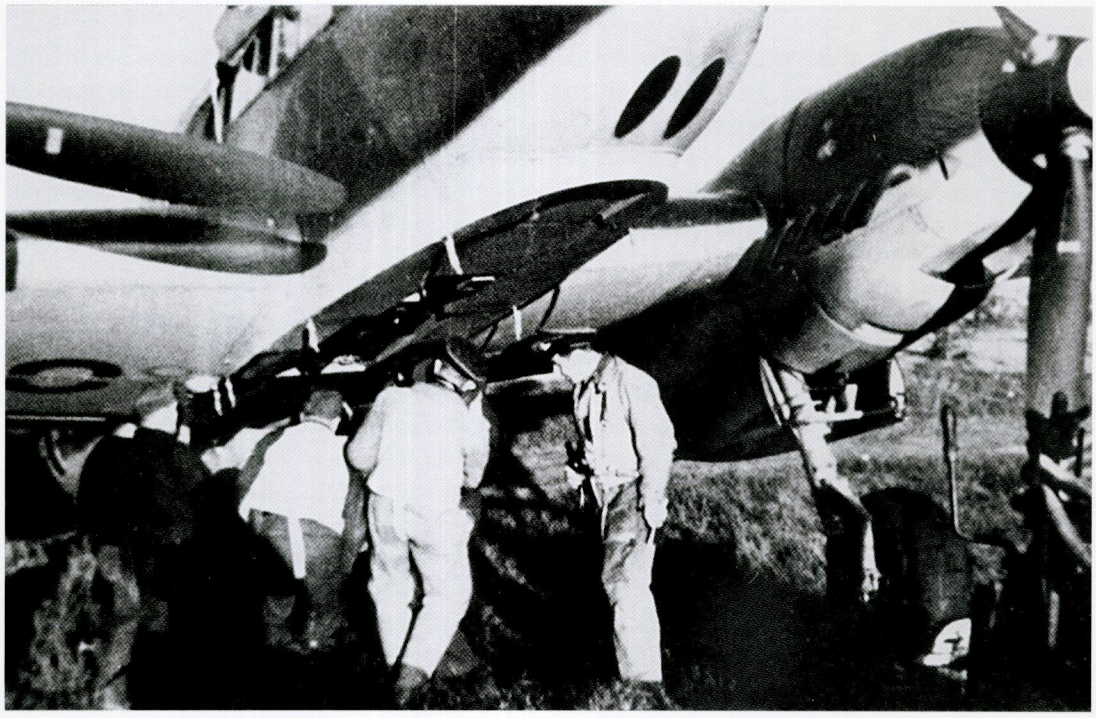
With better weather predicted, 15 August was to prove to be a busy day for the *Zerstörer* units. Operations against the English mainland commenced in the morning, but it was not until the afternoon that the *Bf 110*s entered the fray. *Luftflotte 5*'s entry into the Battle of Britain on 15 August was somewhat auspicious, and had a direct bearing on its units further employment in 1940. Operating from Scandinavia, the bomber force was escorted by the *Bf 110 Ds* of *I./ZG 76* operating out of Stavanger. A feint raid by *Heinkel He 115*s to divert British attention from the main focus of attack approached the English coast on an incorrect track, and as a result inadvertently provided the RAF with early information concerning the course of the attacking force. As a result, four RAF squadrons were scrambled, and intercepted the raiders initially over the North Sea. Among the *Bf 110* formation, the first to be shot down into the sea was *Gruppenkommandeur Hptm.* Werner Restermeyer, and in the combat which followed a further five losses were suffered. Of the 12 aircrew involved in these losses, only three survived into captivity. Three more *Bf 110*s managed to return to base damaged. One of them crash-landed at Esbjerg with only the pilot, *Uffz. Richter* on board. Richter's *Bordfunker* had baled out over the North Sea and was posted missing. The losses suffered in this action resulted in *I./ZG 76* taking no further part in the Battle of Britain, and the unit was eventually recalled to Germany and incorporated into the emerging night fighter force.



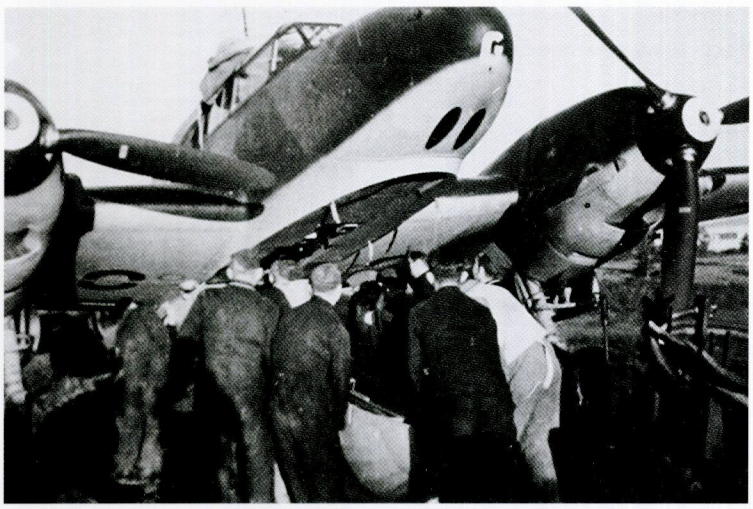


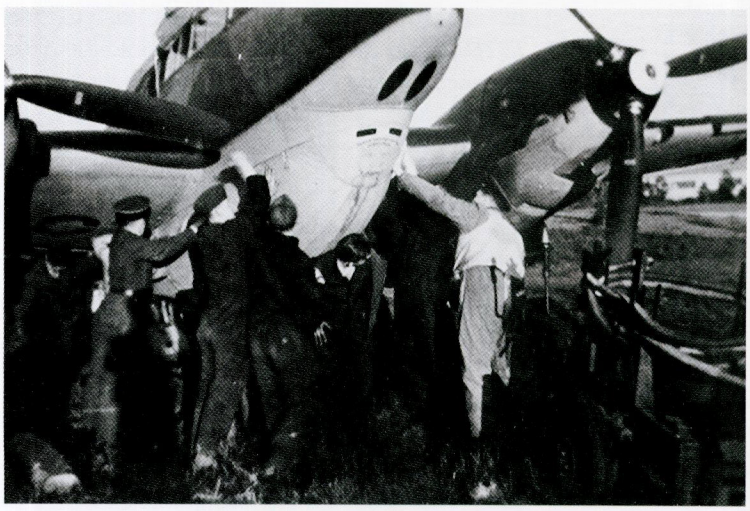
*ABOVE*: M8+FH, a Bf 110 D 'Dackelbauch' of 1./ZG 76. This unit suffered heavy losses during its one mission of the Battle of Britain on 15 August 1940.

*LEFT*: A frontal view of a Dackelbauch of 2./ZG 76 showing to good effect the ribbed construction of the fairing enclosing the additional fuel tank.



*RIGHT, BELOW AND BELOW RIGHT*: Three views showing a Dackelbauch being fitted to a Bf 110 D of I./ZG 76. Note the individual aircraft letter, G, on the nose, and the fuel staining on the front of the ribbed fairing.





Further south, *II./ZG 76* had also been heavily involved in action over the Channel. Flying escort to *Ju 88*s of *Lehrgeschwader* 1, they came under heavy attack from up to eight RAF squadrons in an action that took place in the area of the *Ju 88*s' target, Worthy Down airfield, and out over the Channel. While the *Haifisch Gruppe* pilots lodged victory claims, among whom was the rising star of *6. Staffel*, Hans-Joachim Jabs, it also recorded the loss of six *Bf 110*s, with another two returning to France so badly damaged that they were classified as 100 per cent write-offs. To complete the *Geschwader*'s action for the day, *III./ZG 76* flew escort to *Ju 87*s of *I./StG 1* and *II./StG 2* in concert with a mixed force of fighters including the *Bf 110*s of *V.(Z)/LG 1*. While attempting to protect their charges, *III. Gruppe* lost four aircraft. Among the losses was its popular *Gruppenkommandeur*, *Hptm.* Friedrich-Karl Dickoré, whose *Bf 110* collided with an intercepting fighter. Dickoré's body was later washed ashore on the French coast. His place as *Gruppenkommandeur* was taken by Rolf Kaldrack, *Staffelkapitän* of *7. Staffel*, who would be killed in action in the service of *ZG 1* on the Russian Front in February 1942. On this occasion, *V.(Z)/LG 1* fared better than their other *Zerstörer* counterparts, with just one *Bf 110* returning to base damaged, with the crew wounded but safe.

*LEFT*: Hptm. Karl-Friedrich Dickoré, left, and Oblt. Rolf Kaldrack, of III./ZG 76, Gruppen-kommandeur of III. Gruppe and Staffelkapitän of 7./ZG 76 respectively. Dickoré was killed in action on 15 August over the Channel, Kaldrack taking over as Gruppen-kommandeur.

## 15 August – Martlesham Heath

During the mid-afternoon, *Erprobungsgruppe 210* took off from Calais-Marck to attack Martlesham Heath airfield in Suffolk. For this mission, no fighter escort was provided. The unit flew in over the North Sea and reached the airfield unopposed, although Hurricanes of 1 and 17 Squadrons had been scrambled to intercept. The unit's bombs fell on the airfield, and the overall damage was compounded by a direct hit on a Fairey Battle loaded with 1000 lbs. worth of bombs. Following the raid, the Hurricanes which had been scrambled to intercept the unit finally made contact, but on this occasion the losses were all on the RAF side. Three Hurricanes of 1 Squadron were shot down and one from 17 Squadron crash-landed. One *Bf 110*, piloted by *Lt.* Erich Beudel, received damage to the extent that it was not serviceable to fly on any other missions that day. Beudel would have to fly another of the unit's *Bf 110s* for a raid later in the day.

## 15 August – Croydon

At around 18:20 hours in the early evening of 15 August, the *Gruppenstab* and all three *Staffeln* of *Erprobungsgruppe 210* took off from Calais-Marck to mount a raid on Kenley airfield. *Bf 109* escort for the raid came from *JG 52*. Over the Channel, one *Bf 110* from *2. Staffel* had to turn back due to mechanical problems, reducing the attackers to 14 *Bf 110*s and the eight *Bf 109* E-4/Bs of *3. Staffel*. On the way to the target, the escort from *JG* 52 became detached and subsequently turned back to France, leaving *Erprobungsgruppe 210* to continue on to the target alone. Approaching the target over Sevenoaks, for some reason Walter Rubensdörffer, the *Gruppenkommandeur*, lined up the unit and dived down to attack Croydon, not Kenley. In the meantime, 111 Squadron had taken off from Croydon, and 32 Squadron and all other fighters that were airworthy were scrambled from Biggin Hill. They were sighted by *Erprobungsgruppe 210* climbing for position as the unit bombed Croydon, *3. Staffel* going in last as was the custom with the unit, and then climbing to set about re-grouping and making course for France in the knowledge that two enemy squadrons were positioning to attack. Both RAF squadrons attacked as the unit attempted to reform, and although 'defence circles' (the practice of a *Bf 110* formation forming a 'nose-to-tail' circle to cover each other) were formed by the *Zerstörer*, upon breaking for home the losses started. All the staff officers in the *Gruppenstab* were shot down, Rubensdörffer and his *Bordfunker, Ogefr.* Richard Kretcher being killed in the crash of their *Bf 110*; *Oblt.* Horst Fiedler, *Gruppenadjutant*, dying three days later of his wounds while his *Bordfunker*, Johann Werner, survived into captivity. The unit's Technical Officer, *Lt.* Karl-Heinz Koch, effected a good belly-landing near the coast, both he and *Bordfunker Uffz.* Rolf Kahl becoming prisoners. Kahl's injuries were so severe that he was repatriated in the mid-war years. Three more *Bf 110*s were shot down, among them the only *Bf 110 C-6* to crash on the English mainland during the Battle, its *1. Staffel* crew of pilot *Lt.* Erich Beudel and *Ogefr.* Otto Jordan both being killed in the crash. At 19, Otto Jordan was the youngest member of the unit to be killed in action. The only *Bf 109* to be lost was that of *Lt.* Horst Marx, who unselfishly tried to escort his *Gruppenkommandeur*'s crippled *Bf 110* back

*LEFT*: Walter Rubensdörffer, extreme left, with officers of Erpr. Gr. 210: Oblt. Otto Hintze, second left, Staffelkapitän of 3. Staffel; Oblt. Wilhelm-Richard Roßiger,third from left, Staffelkapitän of 2. Staffel; Oblt. Martin Lutz, 4 from left, Staffelkapitän of 1. Staffel; Lt. Horst Marx, pilot of 3. Staffel, holding briefcase; unknown behind Marx, and Oblt. Horst Fiedler, Gruppenadjutant. Of those identified, only Hintze and Marx survived the Battle of Britain, both as prisoners.

to France, and in the process was pounced upon by a Hurricane of the Biggin Hill Training Flight. Marx, a former *Bf 110* pilot with *1./ZG 1*, baled out into captivity. *2. Staffel* lost two *Bf 110*s, with three of the four crew becoming prisoners of war. Fielding nine Hurricanes each, the two RAF squadrons suffered no losses in the action.

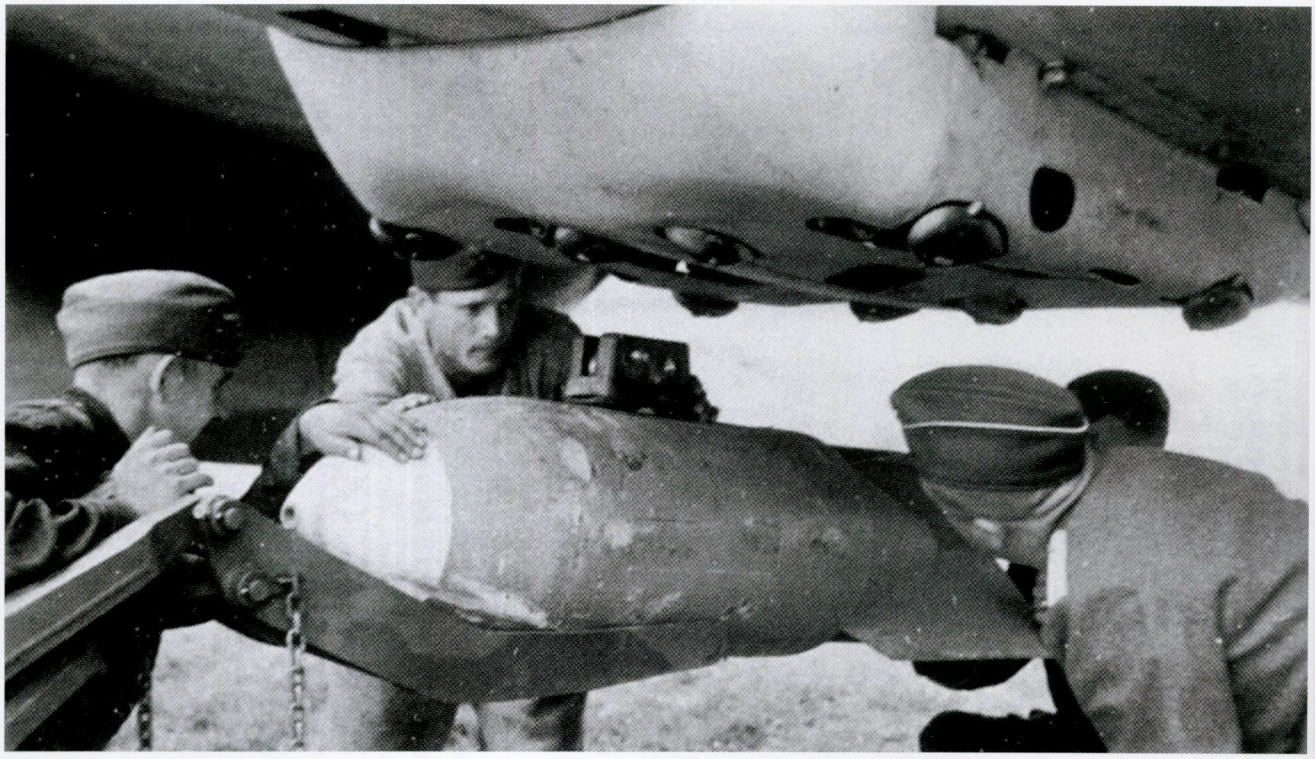
A young employee of Rollasons, George Stratton, recalled the *Erprobungsgruppe 210* raid. "Although I do not remember how the day of 15 August 1940 began, no doubt I left my home in Howley Road and cycled to my place of work, Rollasons at Croydon Airport, arriving by the starting time of 8:00 a.m. Rollasons specialised in carrying out aircraft repairs and modifications and I was employed by them as a fitter to undertake carpentry, rigging and metalwork. I worked on a number of different aircraft and on the day of the raid I seem to remember a Handley Page Harrow being in the hangar and working on this.

"At the time, it was early evening, I was not aware of any warning being given. However, afterwards I realised that there must have been some indication of what was to happen as the hangar doors, that were sometimes left open during the summer months, were abruptly closed. My first indication came from the roar of aircraft close overhead and the whistling of falling bombs. All of us in the hangar seemed to run for cover in different directions. I cannot recall where others went but I ended up alone in a wooden shed located in a corner of the hangar. The shed had been provided for army personnel. I think they were there to provide security cover. As I lay there, I realised I was sheltering alongside a number of compressed air or gas cylinders that were being stored in the shed. It was all very confusing, but I can remember feeling the ground shaking and hearing muffled crashes. Then there was quietness and my only thought was to get away and go home. I got out of the shed as quickly as possible, found my bike and left the hangar.

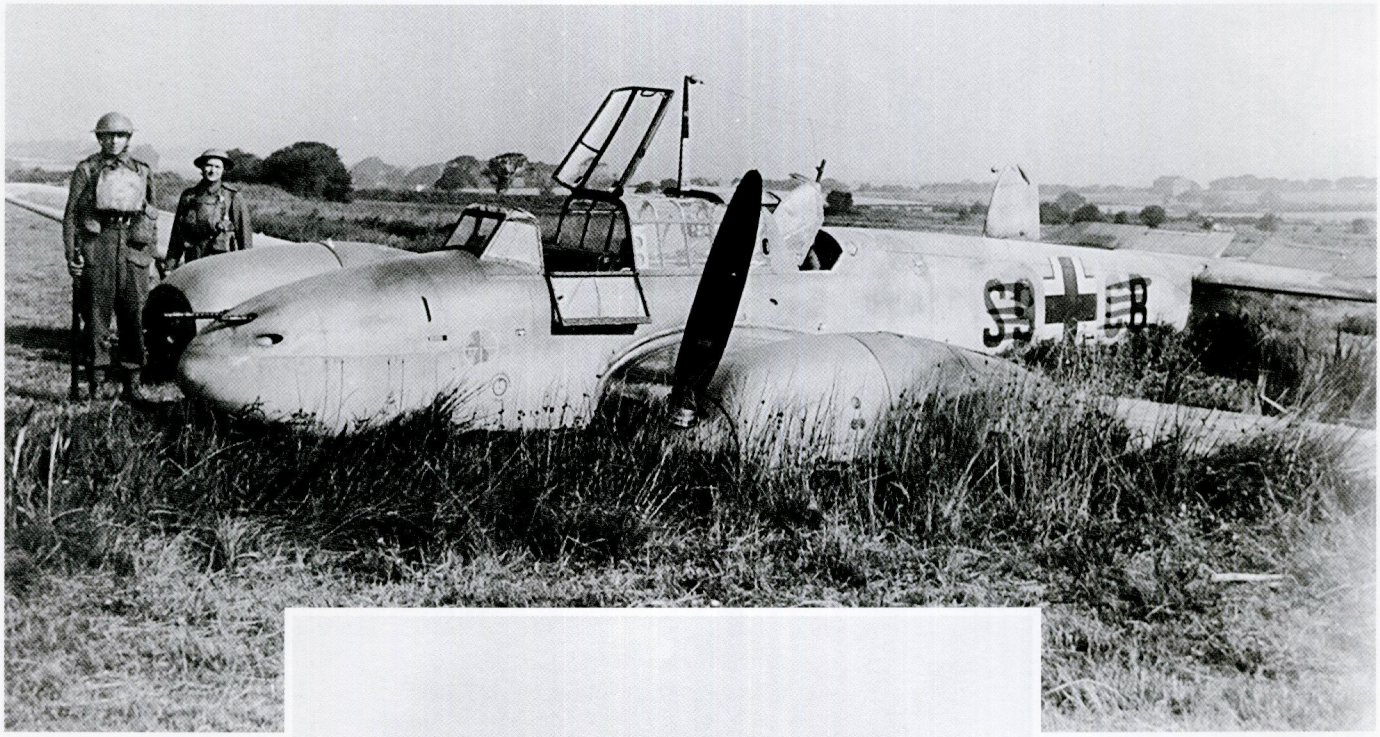
"Outside I noticed a bomb crater nearby and there was chalk dust everywhere; I did not look back. Unlike my journey to work, I can clearly remember my return journey. People were standing in their doorways; at their front gates, and at the pavement edge. They were anxiously awaiting the safe return of their family members and hoping they had not been caught in the raid. I arrived home where my father was waiting at the gate and I can remember my sister commenting that my overalls were covered in dust.

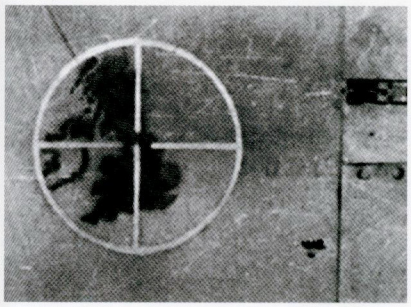
"After a few days, instructions were received to report to Croydon Town Hall where I received my wages. As a result of the raid, Rollasons ceased operating from Croydon Airport. I could have transferred to their premises at Hanworth, but the journey would have been too difficult and so my employment with them came to an end."

Thus ended a day that was later to be known within the *Luftwaffe* as 'Black Thursday'.



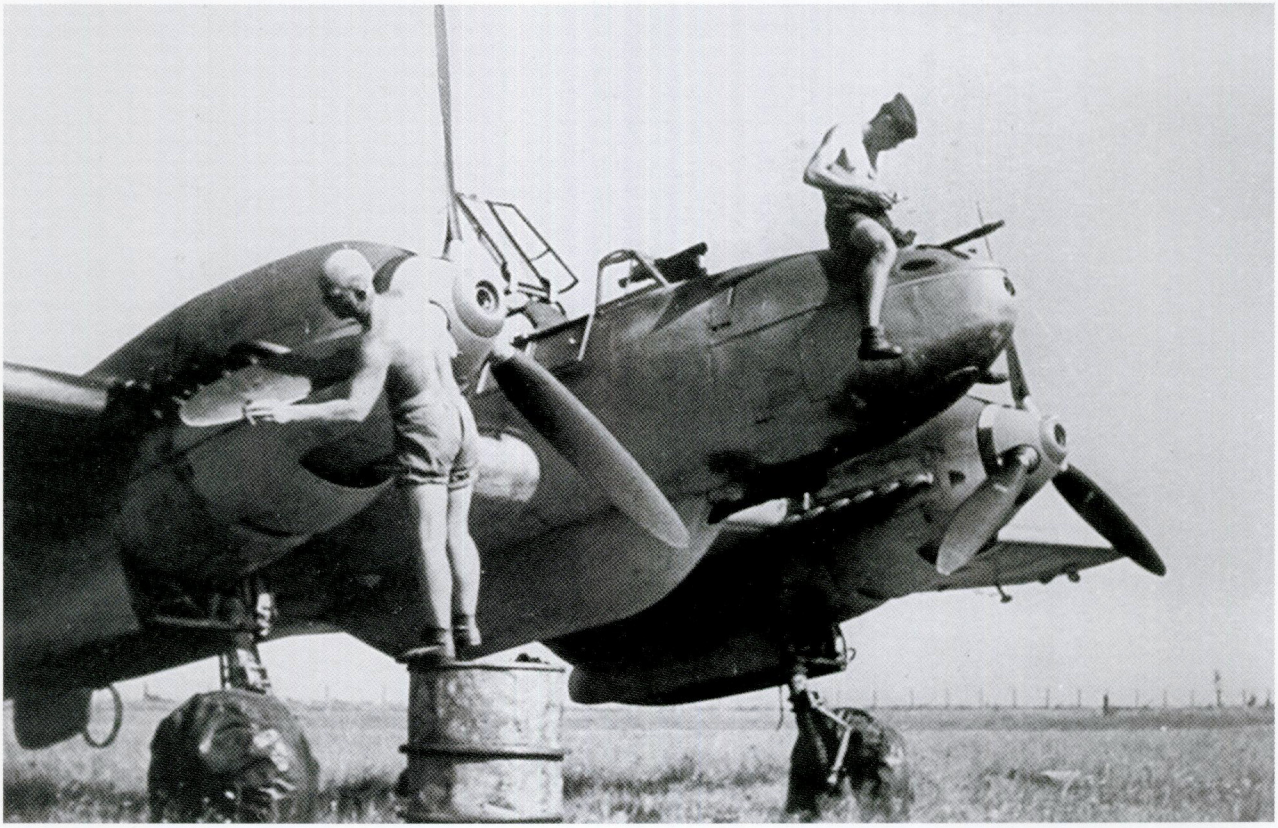
*RIGHT*: Mechanics fit a bomb onto the fuselage bomb rack of a 'Jabo' of Erpr. Gr. 210.





*ABOVE AND LEFT*: Two views of Bf 110 D-0, S9+CB, of the Gruppenstab of Erprobungsgruppe 210 crash-landed at Hooe. On one photograph, the censor has tried unsuccessfully to obscure the unit code on the fuselage. Later, the aircraft was covered in netting to camouflage it from above and prevent its destruction from the air by any passing Luftwaffe fighter.

*ABOVE*: The emblem of Erprobungsgruppe 210 as seen on the Bf 110 D-0, S9+CB, of the Gruppe Technical Officer, Lt. Karl-Heinz Koch, after he belly-landed the machine in the early evening of 15 August 1940 at Hooe on the south coast of England.

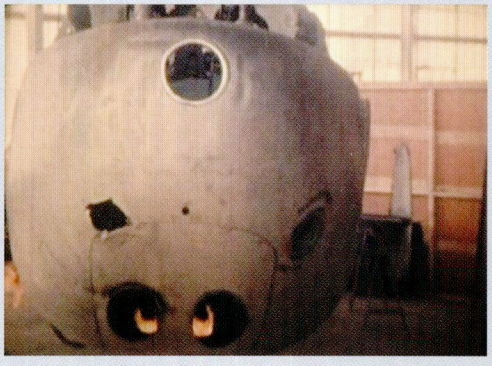


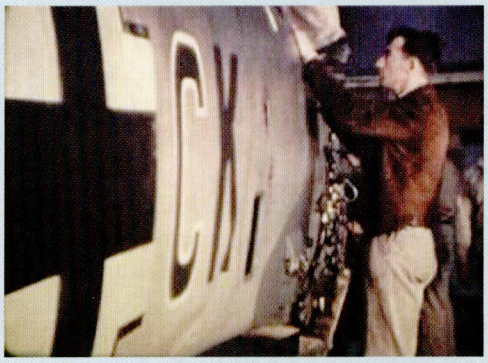
*RIGHT*: A Bf 110 C-6 of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210. Of interest is the telescopic gunsight fitted.

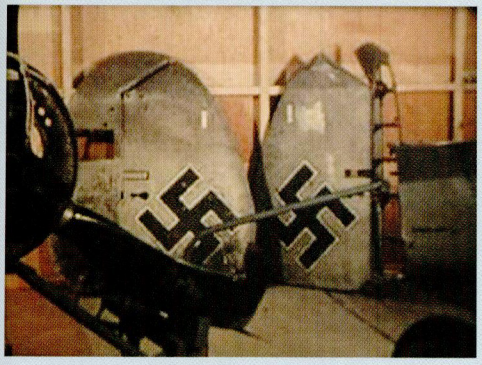
*ABOVE*: Bf 110 D-0, S9+CK, W. Nr. 3341, of 2./Erpr. Gr. 210 which came down at Hawkhurst following the Croydon raid of 15 August 1940, seen here being put on display in Hendon Park. The crew of Oblt. Alfred Habisch, pilot, and Uffz. Ernst Elfner, Bordfunker, survived into captivity.

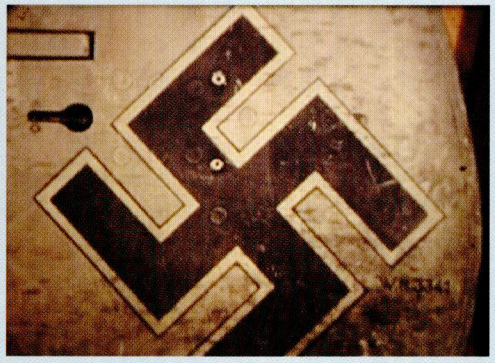
# S9+CK

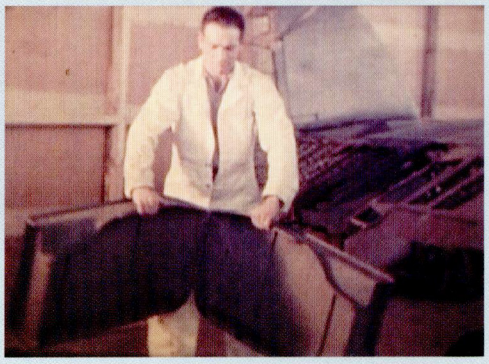
Messerschmitt Bf 110 D-0/B, S9+CK, was probably the most photographed aircraft of the Luftwaffe. Shot down in the early evening of 15 August 1940, it was subsequently put on display in the second half of August in a London street, and later at the end of the month in Hendon Park. In spring 1941 it was shipped over to the USA and passed to Vultee Aircraft Corporation for that company to evaluate. Vultee produced a 16 mm colour film of S9+CK, and the following photographs are taken from it.

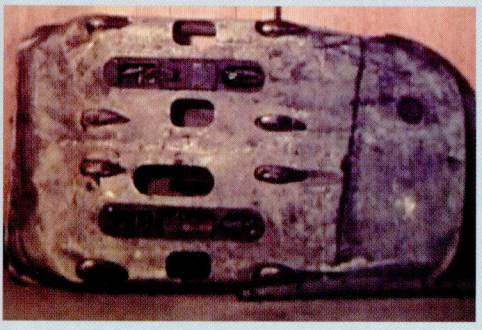


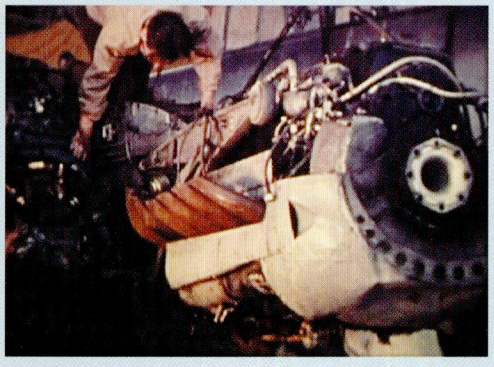


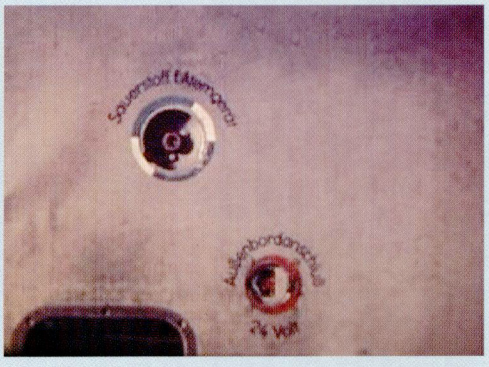


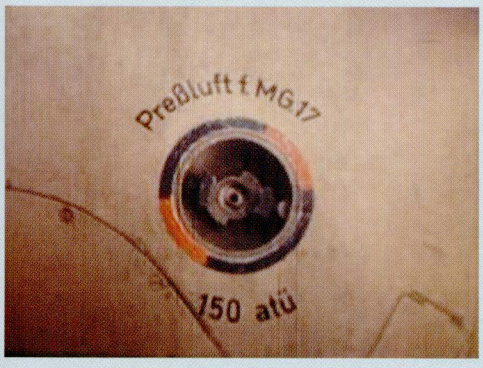


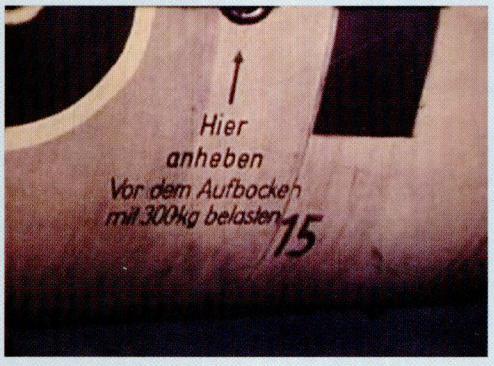


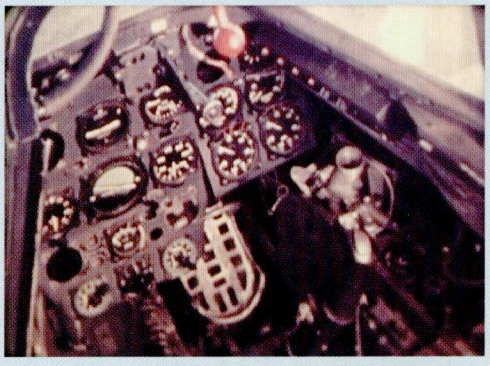


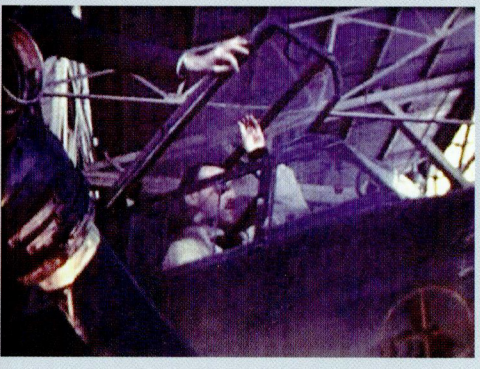


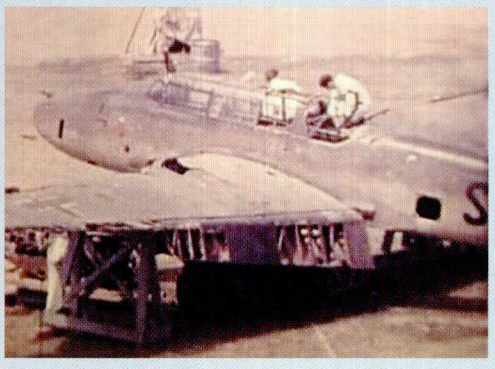

Sauerstoff f. Atemgerät
Außenbordanschluß
76 Volt


Preßluft f. MG 17
150 atü


Hier
anheben
Vor dem Aufbocken
mit 300kg belasten
15







S9 C.K

## 16 August

The *Zerstörer* force was once again in action on the day following 'Black Thursday', a day when *Messerschmitt Bf 109* units suffered far heavier losses than their *Messerschmitt Bf 110* counterparts. During the day elements of *I./ZG 26*, *II./ZG 2*, and *II.* and *III./ZG 76* were called upon as the *Luftwaffe* launched attacks in the east and central coastal areas of England. Airfields, as well as the Ventnor RDF station, in the central region came under attack from *Stuka*s and level bombers. It was for a combat on this day also that the only award of the Victoria Cross to a Fighter Command pilot was made. Flight Lieutenant Nicholson of 249 Squadron received the award for attacking and shooting down a *Bf 110* while remaining in the burning cockpit of his Hurricane. Whereas *Bf 110* units suffered casualties, it has not proved possible to tie in the claim for Nicholson's *Bf 110* with any loss suffered in the area at that time of day. Among the losses was *Lt.* Richard Marchfelder, the *Gruppe* Technical Officer of *III./ZG 76* and designer of not only the 'Running Dog' emblem found on *Bf 109*s of *JG 141* in the second half of 1939, but also the 'three wasps above clouds' 'Wespe' emblem of *II./ZG 1*, which was to find its greatest fame as the large single wasp on *Bf 110*s of *ZG 1* on the Russian and Mediterranean fronts. Marchfelder and his *Bordfunker* parachuted into captivity. *Oblt.* Ernst Hollekamp of *6./ZG 2* and *Lt.* Walter Lemmer of *5./ZG 76* were other casualties, but the highest ranking loss of this day was that of *Major* Harry Carl, *Gruppenkommandeur* of *II./ZG 2*, who managed to get his battle-damaged *Bf 110* back to France, but both he and his *Bordfunker* were killed in the ensuing crash-landing. The officer class of the *Zerstörer* units continued to be slowly drained away as the Battle progressed.

After the exertions of the previous days, 17 August resulted in a lull in proceedings, but the following day combat would be joined again in what one eminent historian has justifiably named 'The Hardest Day'. Whereas 15 September would later be known as 'Battle of Britain' day, the day's action on 18 August would result in the highest total losses overall for any single day of the Battle.

## 18 August

Following the loss of a reconnaissance *Bf 110 C-5* of *7.(F)/LG 2* in the morning of 18 August, the first major *Luftwaffe* raid formed up in the area of the Pas de Calais. With allocated targets of Biggin Hill and Kenley, the bombers had among their fighter escort the *Bf 110*s of *ZG 26*. One feature of the raids was to be the low-level attack on Kenley by *9./KG 76*, a role not normally allotted to standard bomber units, although this *Staffel* had practised such attacks during the western campaign some months earlier. The difficult time for the bombers and their escorts came after the completion of the raids, and it was at this time that *ZG 26* took heavy losses from the intercepting RAF fighters. Nine *Bf 110*s were shot down, including those of *I. Gruppe* Adjutant, *Oblt.* Rüdiger Proske, and the *Staffelkapitän* of *3. Staffel*, *Oblt.* Hans-Jürgen Kirchoff. Proske survived into captivity, but Kirchoff was killed. As the *Luftwaffe* force retired to France, another raid, to be undertaken by *Luftflotte 3*, was making final preparations for a raid on airfields off the central coast of England. No *Bf 110*s took part in this second raid, possibly due to the attrition and exhaustion suffered by both men and machines from the missions of the preceding days. This particular raid was to go down in the history of the Battle of Britain as the occasion when the *Ju 87*s of *Stukageschwader 77* suffered grievous losses.

*BELOW*: Lt. Hans-Ulrich Kettling (left) of 1./ZG 76 and Lt. Rüdiger Proske, Gruppenadjutant of I./ZG 26. Both would be shot down into captivity within days of each other; Kettling on 15 August, Proske on 18 August.

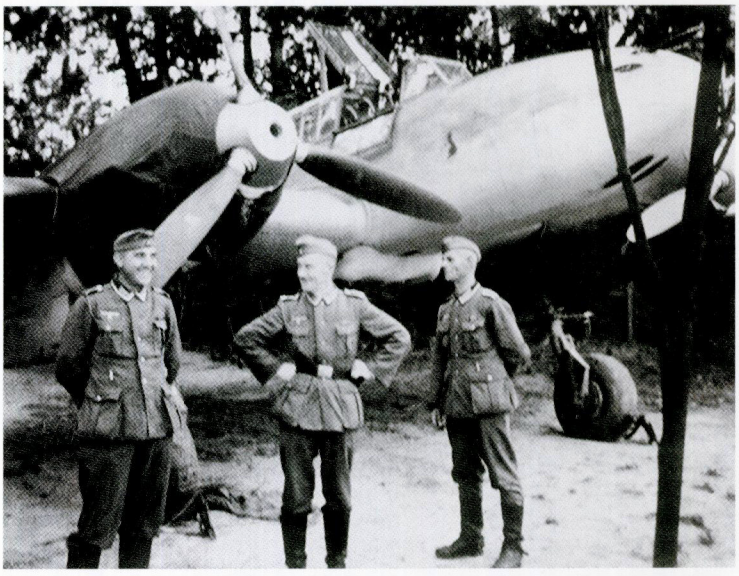
However, in late afternoon the indefatigable *ZG 26* once again escorted a force of bombers tasked to attack Hornchurch and North Weald. The ever-watchful eyes of the RDF chain tracked the incoming raid and, once again, the *Zerstörer* of *ZG 26* suffered losses. Notable among the late afternoon casualties for *ZG 26* was the *Staffelkapitän* of *2./ZG 26*, *Hptm.* Herbert Kaminski who ditched into the North Sea and, with *Bordfunker* Heinrich Strauch, spent four days in a dinghy before being rescued by the German air-sea rescue service. While over-estimating their claims again, *ZG 26* had 13 *Bf 110*s shot down, with a further six crash-landing back in France, two of which were classed as 100 per cent write-offs.

The days following saw little activity of note, due mainly to a period of indifferent weather over England. On 20 August *Erpr. Gr. 210* did lose one *Bf 110* out of three sent to raid a convoy sailing off the south-east coast of England: they had the misfortune to be intercepted by six Spitfires of 66 Squadron airborne from Coltishall.

*ZG 2* and *ZG 26* were in action on 24 August, the former losing one aircraft and the latter having one crash-land back at Arques, while a reconnaissance *Bf 110* from the *Auf. Gr. Ob. d. L.* was shot down over Sheerness. *Erpr. Gr. 210* once again paid a visit to Manston airfield, which was rapidly

becoming unusable due to the regular bombardment it was receiving.

The following day saw a return to action for *Zerstörer* units, with most of them out in force. The two *Gruppen* of *ZG 2*, *III./ZG 76* and *V.(Z)/LG 1* were part of the escorting force accompanying *Ju 88*s. Facing them was a combined force of Spitfires and Hurricanes from 87, 213 and 17 Squadrons (Hurricanes) and 602, 609 and 152 Squadron (Spitfires). With *Bf 109 Staffeln* involved as well, a wide-ranging combat took place as the opposing forces made contact. Once again, *Luftwaffe* claims in general, and *Zerstörer* claims in particular, were inflated. On the debit side, seven *Bf 110*s and crews were lost, including pilot *Fw.* Manfred Dähne who had been shot down over Switzerland in early June. *1./ZG 2* lost *Staffelkapitän Oblt.* Gerard Götz, who parachuted into captivity. A further six *Bf 110*s returned damaged, two being 100 per cent write-offs.



*ABOVE*: Army personnel pose in front of a Bf 110 D-0 fighter-bomber of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210. Note the multi-coloured spinners (white/blue/white), a feature of 1. Staffel of this unit, and the unit emblem on the nose of the aircraft.

It was the turn of *ZG 26* to take losses on 26 August: three aircraft were lost together with one damaged in combat from *II./ZG 2* over the Channel.

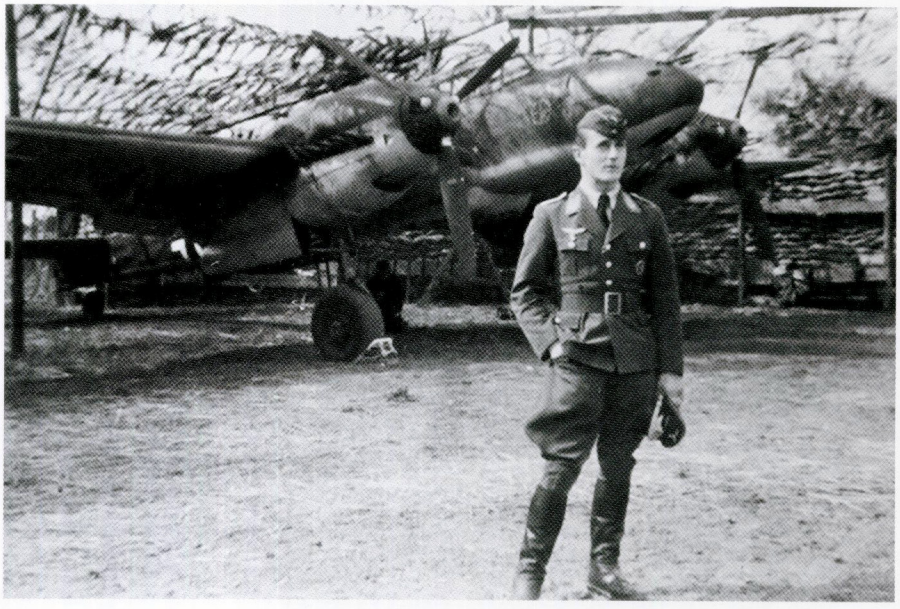
Activity slackened on the ensuing days, but on 30 August the tempo increased once again. Just before midday, *III./ZG 76* formed part of the escort for a formation of *He 111*s of *KG 1* on an attack on Farnborough. On this occasion the *Zerstörer* escaped without loss. In the late afternoon a further raid was mounted involving *KG 53*'s *He 111*s with escort drawn from *II./ZG 2*, *II./ZG 26* and *II./ZG 76*. As usual, RAF Squadrons were airborne and the *Messerschmitt 110*s became the main target for two Hurricane squadrons, 56 and 242. In the combat that followed, the now inevitable losses occurred in the *Bf 110* ranks. Among the losses were two *Staffelkapitäne*: *Hptm.* Adolf Schuldt, *Kapitän* of *5./ZG 2* was killed along with his *Bordfunker* in *Bf 110 D-0*, A2+HK, while the *Staffelkapitän* of *4./ZG 76*, *Hptm.* Heinz Wagner and his *Bordfunker* were killed when their *Bf 110 C*, M8+BM, crashed at Ponders End, Enfield. The *Staffelkapitän* of *6./ZG 76*, the future night fighter ace, *Hptm.* Heinz Nacke, managed to get his badly damaged *Bf 110* back to St. Ingelvert, but in the process of landing his M8+KM he wrote it off completely. In spite of the damage to his machine, Nacke still claimed victories during this mission. They were to be his last of the Battle of Britain. Total casualties were four lost and five damaged. The attrition in the *Zerstörer* ranks was continuing, and in the next week would reach epidemic proportions.

One unit, however, carried out a successful mission on 30 August without suffering any loss of aircraft. *Erpr. Gr. 210* took off from Calais-Marck just before 17:30 hours in the afternoon. Through a stroke of good fortune, a mains supply failure serving the RDF stations on the South Coast helped the unit cross the English coast undetected, and it penetrated deep inland without interception and hit Biggin Hill airfield hard. Water, gas, electricity and telephone services were cut, not being restored until the following day. Six Hurricanes of 79 Squadron took off from the airfield and claimed to have shot down two of the attacking aircraft, but *Erpr. Gr. 210* returned to base without loss.

Some *Zerstörer* units had an early start on 31 August, with raids being mounted against Debden and Duxford airfields. Because of the distances involved, *Bf 110* units were tasked with long-range escort duties for these raids; the *Bf 109* did not have the endurance to reach the target and stay for a sufficient time to extricate the bombers from attacking fighters. As a result, *III./ZG 26* escorted the *Do 17*s of *II./KG 2* to Duxford, while *V.(Z)/LG 1* accompanied the *Do 17*s of *III./KG 2* to Debden. The bombers reached their objectives and successfully bombed their allotted targets. On this occasion, the *Bf 110*s were quite successful in getting their charges away from the target and back on the home leg without too many difficulties. One *Do 17* from *II./KG 2* was a write-off, and two from *III./KG 2* landed back at their base with combat damage. The *Bf 110* units fared worse. *V.(Z)/LG 1* lost two aircraft, three of the four crew surviving into captivity. *III./ZG 26* had one shot down and the *Gruppe* Technical Officer, *Oblt.* Georg Christl, crash-landed his *Bf 110* back at St. Omer-Arques.

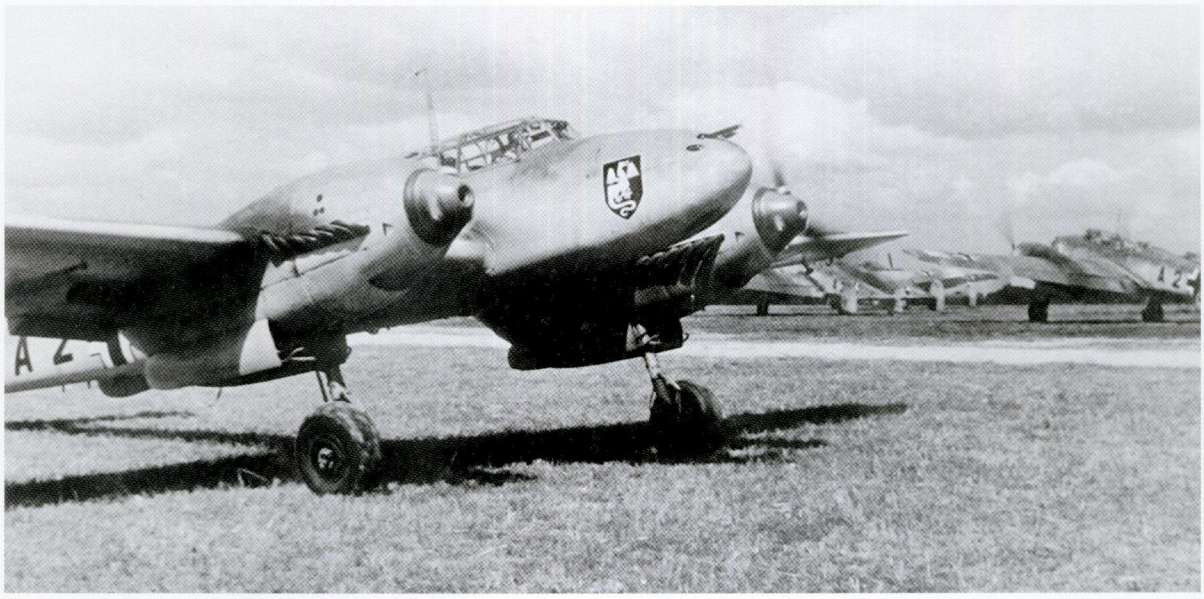
Just after midday *Erpr. Gr. 210* returned to the target that had cost it the heaviest losses in its history: Croydon airfield. The unit reached and hit the target without loss, but suffered one shot down, a *2. Staffel* machine, as they headed home, with two other *2. Staffel* fighter-bombers returning to Calais-Marck damaged.

*ABOVE*: A Bf 110 C of I./ZG 2 taxis, with another behind. The large unit emblem can be seen on the fuselage. Note the light-coloured spinner tips. Bf 110s of this unit saw heavy fighting over the central Channel area on 11 and 12 August 1940.



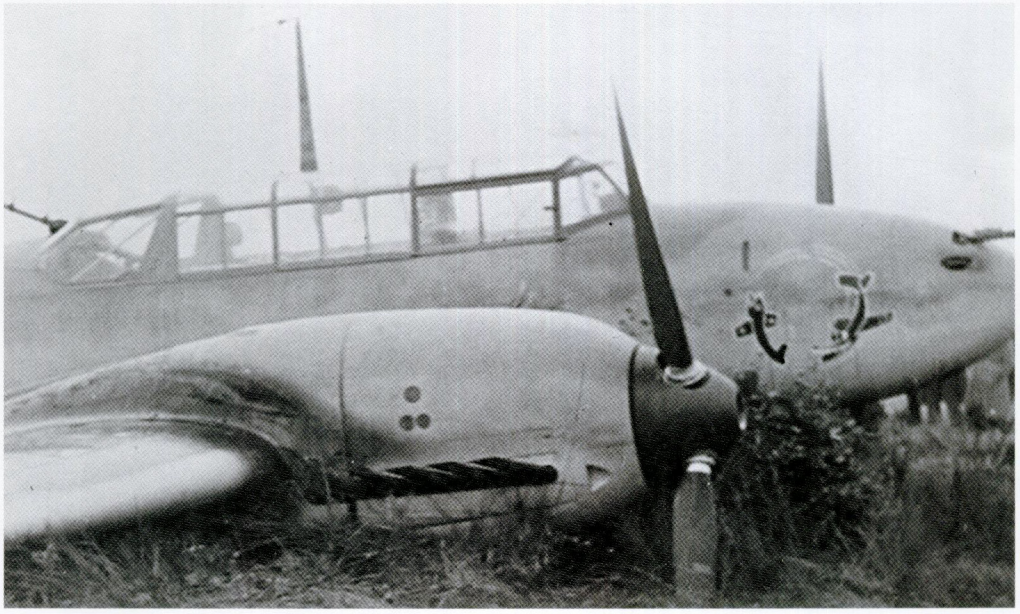
*RIGHT*: Lt. Horst Marx, a pilot of 3./Erpr. Gr. 210, with a Bf 110 D-0 'Jabo' of Erpr. Gr. 210 as a backdrop in this photograph. This aircraft is probably from the first batch issued to the unit, as it carries the solid two-tone upper surface camouflage. The unit emblem, and the extended rear fuselage of the 'D' variant can be seen.

*LEFT*: Bf 110s of II./ZG 2. The nearest, A2+CK, is a 5. Staffel machine bearing the dragon emblem that this unit carried forward from when it was I./ZG 52.

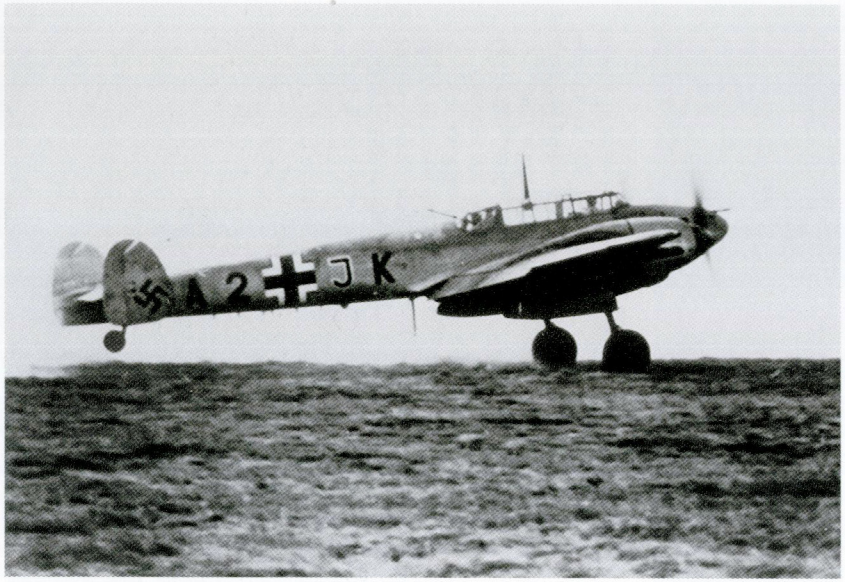


*RIGHT*: Aircraft of II./ZG 2 taxi out for take-off. Note that they carry the lighter camouflaged fuselage sides.

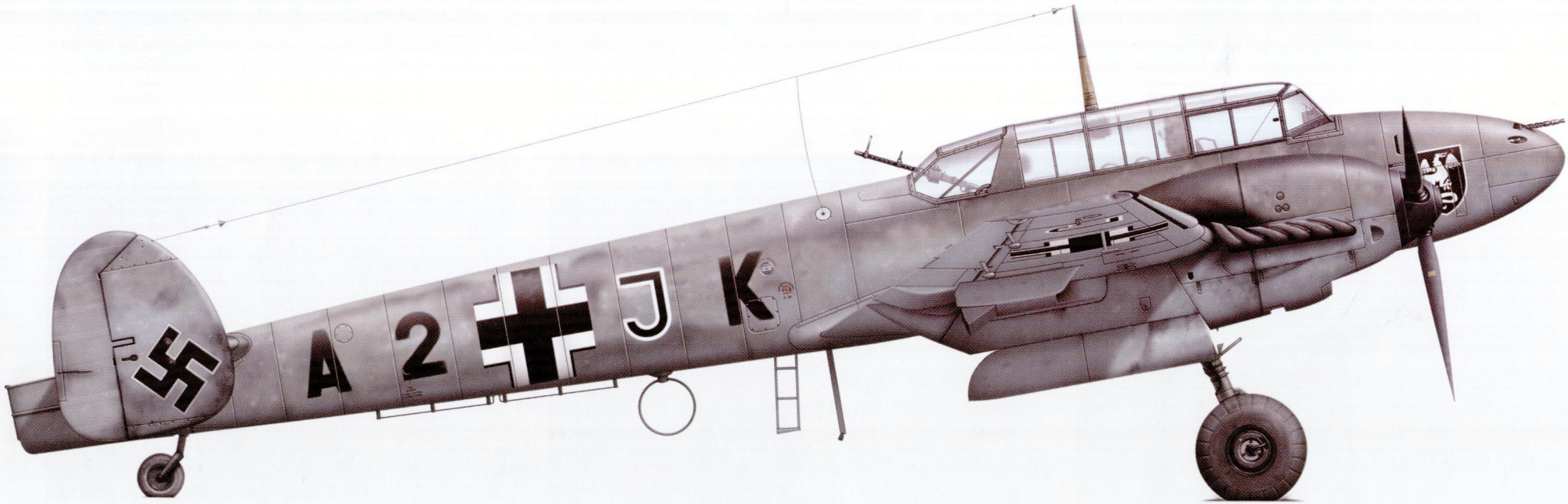
*ABOVE*: A feature of the 'Haifisch' Gruppe, II./ZG 76, was that throughout the Battle of Britain it retained the early style two tone solid upper surface camouflage on its aircraft. M8+DP displays such camouflage, as well as yellow spinner tips and the famous 'Sharksmouth' emblem of the Gruppe.



*LEFT*: Bf 110, U8+BH, of 1./ZG 26 flown by Lt. Joachim Koepsell on 13 August 1940. Koepsell belly-landed this machine at Hertogenbosch, 265 kilometres from base, after becoming disorientated during the return flight.

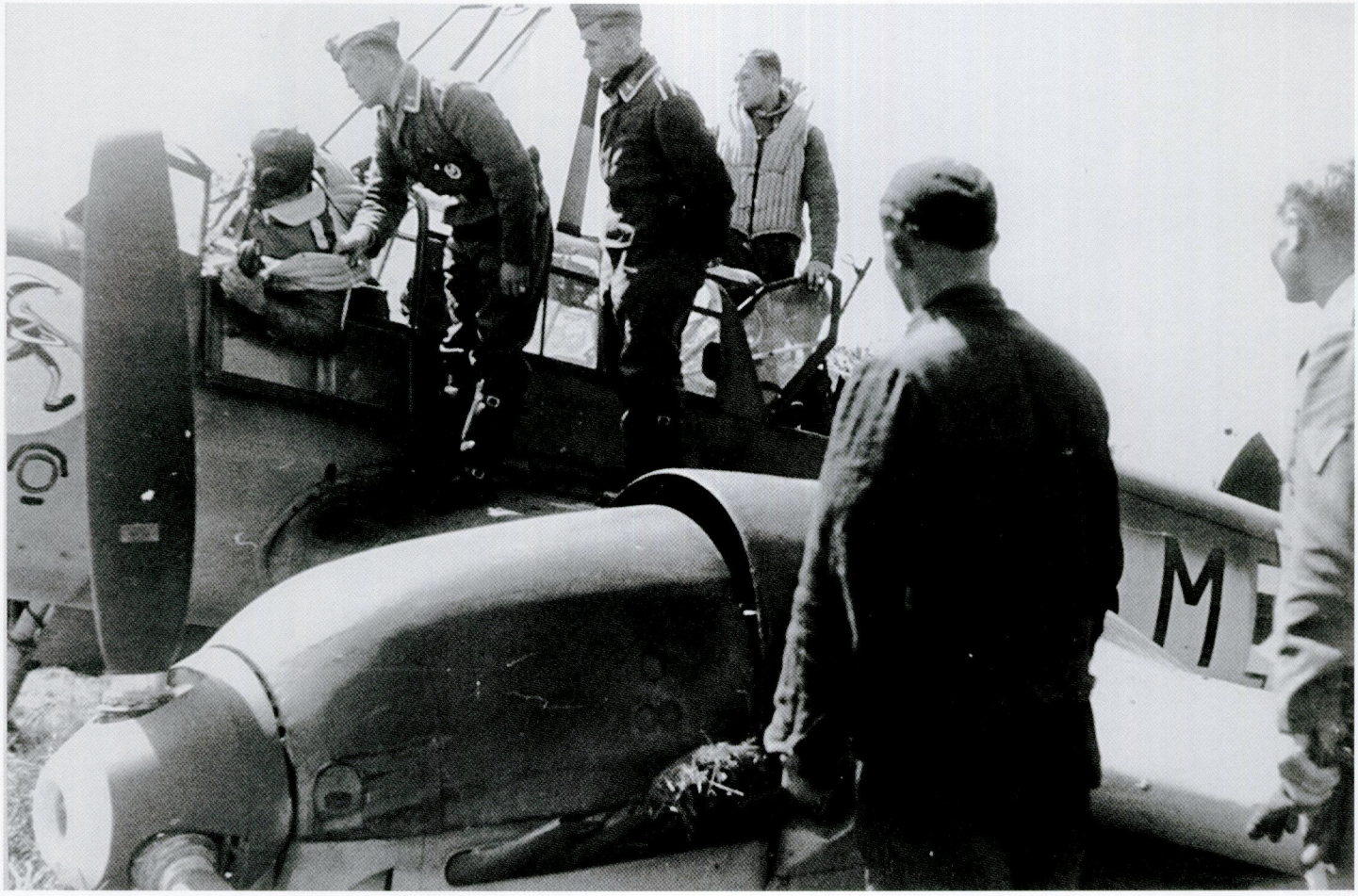



*LEFT*: Bf 110 D-2, A2+JK, of 5./ZG 2 seen taking off in summer 1940. The letter 'J' is black outlined in white.




**Messerschmitt Bf 110 D of 5./ZG 2**

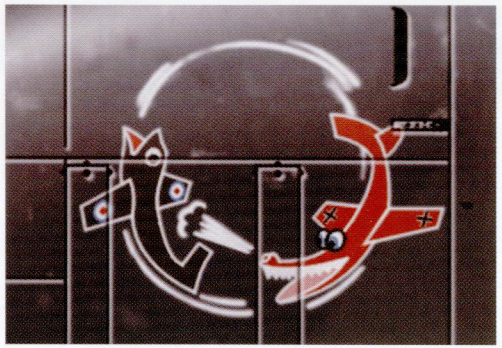
**A2+JK has the revised camouflage applied to the fuselage sides which became more common as the Battle of Britain progressed. The extended rear fuselage points to this aircraft being a 'D' variant. II./ZG 2 flew a mix of 'C' and 'D' variants throughout the Battle.**



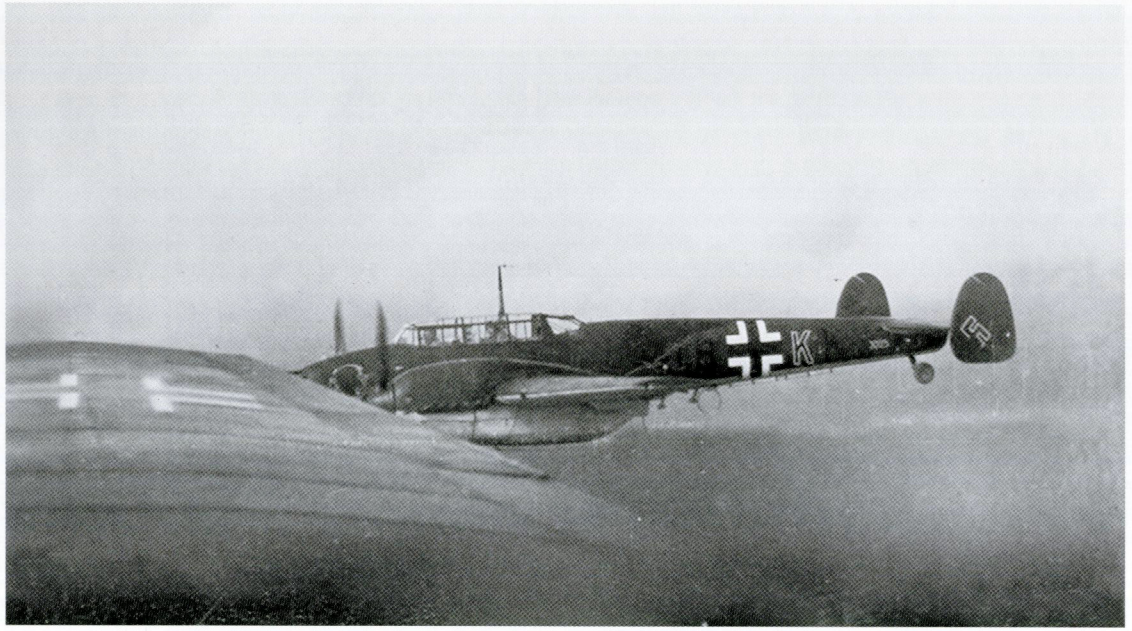
*ABOVE*: A crash-landed Bf 110 D of I./ZG 2 which has the later style light camouflage on the fuselage sides. The pilot appears to be having some difficulty extricating himself from the cockpit while his Bordfunker looks on.

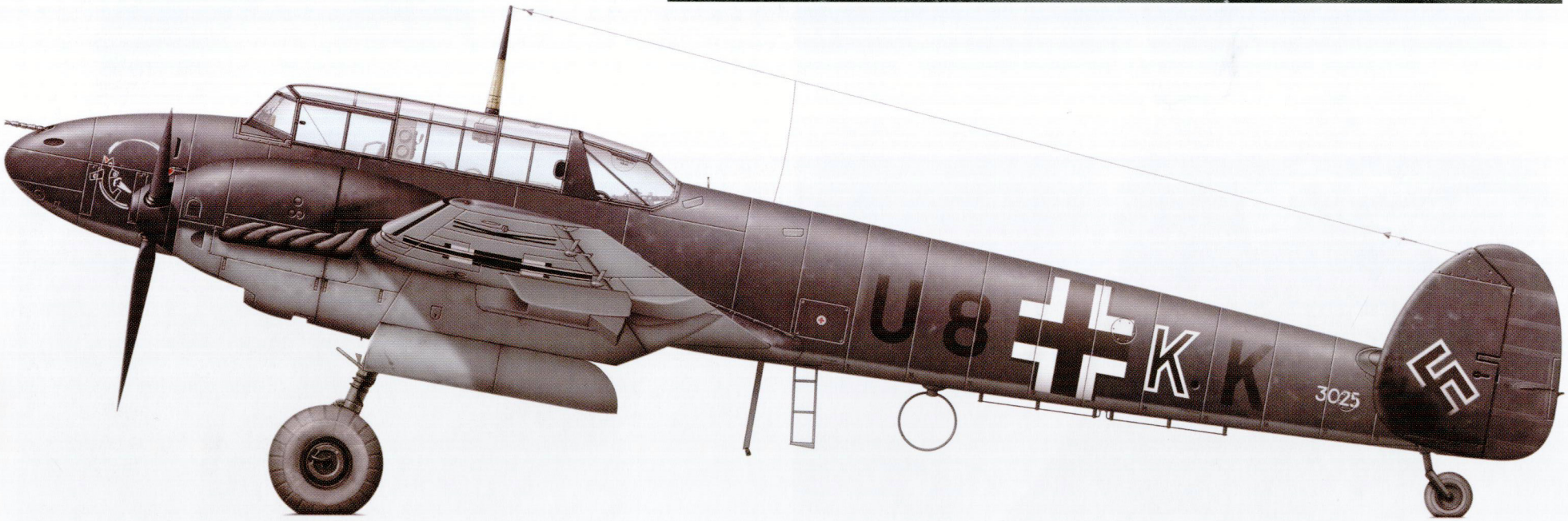
*LEFT*: An alternative to the Dackelbauch, briefly tested in the field in 1940, was the fitment of a small central fuel tank. This was an unofficial move, and frowned upon by Luftwaffe authorities.

*ABOVE*: Hptm. Eberhard Heinlein, Gruppenkommandeur of I./ZG 2, left, in discussion with officers of his I. Gruppe. On the extreme right is Gerhard Granz, Gruppenadjutant, who was shot down into captivity on 7 September 1940.



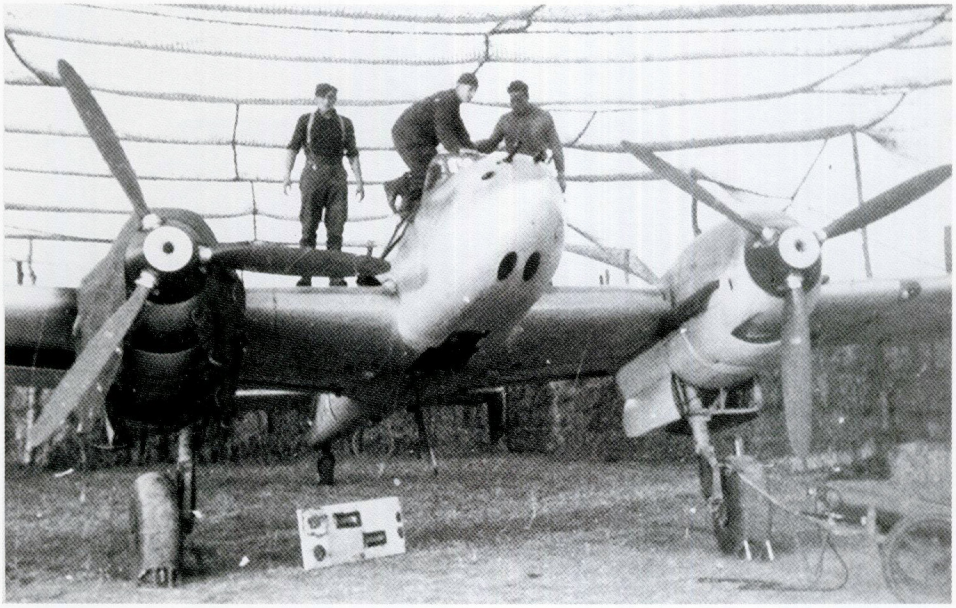
*RIGHT:* Bf 110 C-2, U8+KK, W. Nr. 3025 of 2./ZG 26 carrying the early solid upper surface camouflage. The 'Ringelpitz' emblem of I. Gruppe can be seen on the nose and the Werknummer can be seen in white on the rear fuselage. The letter 'K' is black outlined in white, and there appears to be overspray on the swastika.



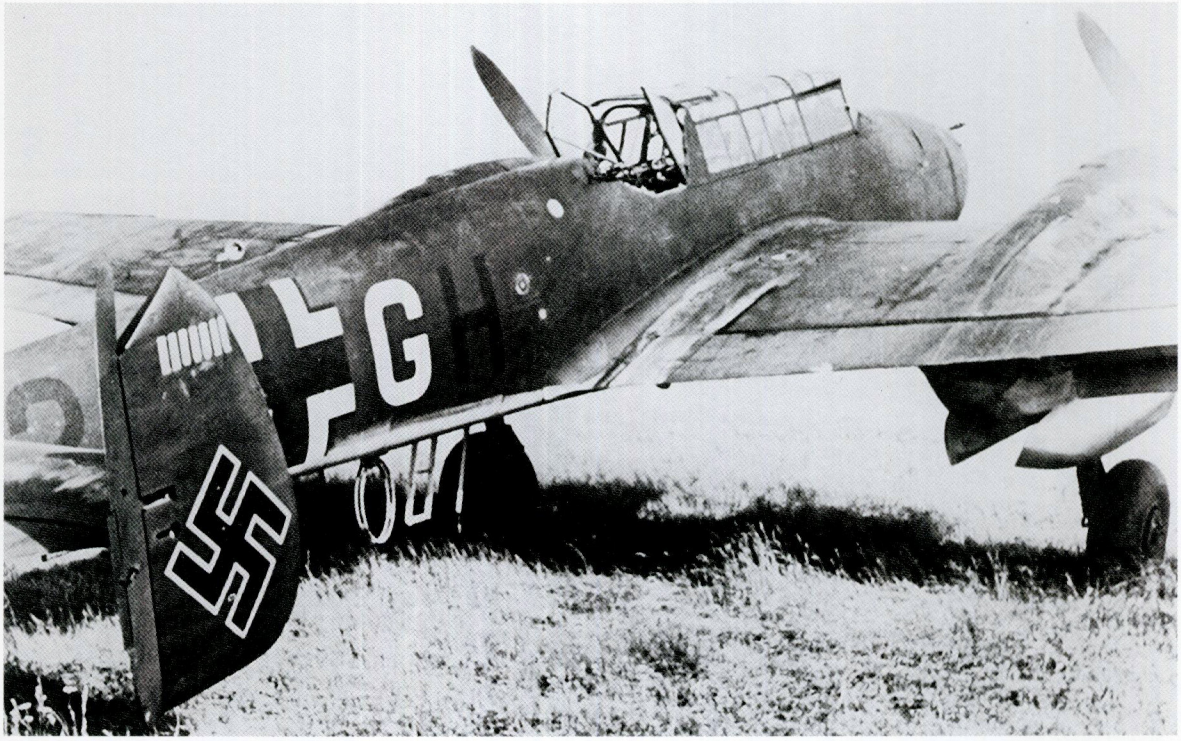



**Messerschmitt Bf 110 C-2 of 2./ZG 26**

**U8+KK, W. Nr. 3025, with solid 70/71 upper surface camouflage. ZG 26 also carried this camouflage deep into the Battle of Britain period, apparently only moving to mottled fuselage sides in September 1940. The I. Gruppe 'Ringelpitz' emblem of a German shark attacking an British fish is carried on the nose. The individual aircraft letter of 'K' is black outlined in white. Note the staining on the port fin, a result of oil leakage from the port engine.**



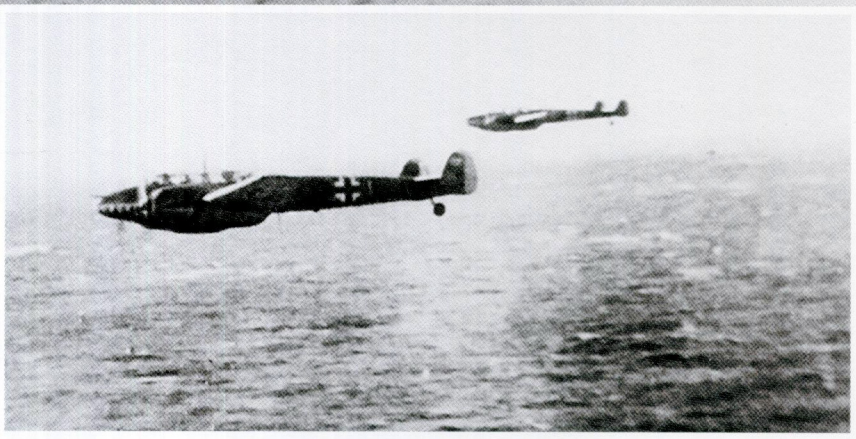
*RIGHT*: Mechanics work on a Bf 110 of 7./ZG 26. The panel covering the ejection chutes is seen on the floor, indicating work being carried out on the 20 mm Kanone.



*RIGHT*: A2+GH of 4./ZG 2 carrying seven victory bars on the starboard fin. The pilot of this aircraft is not known.

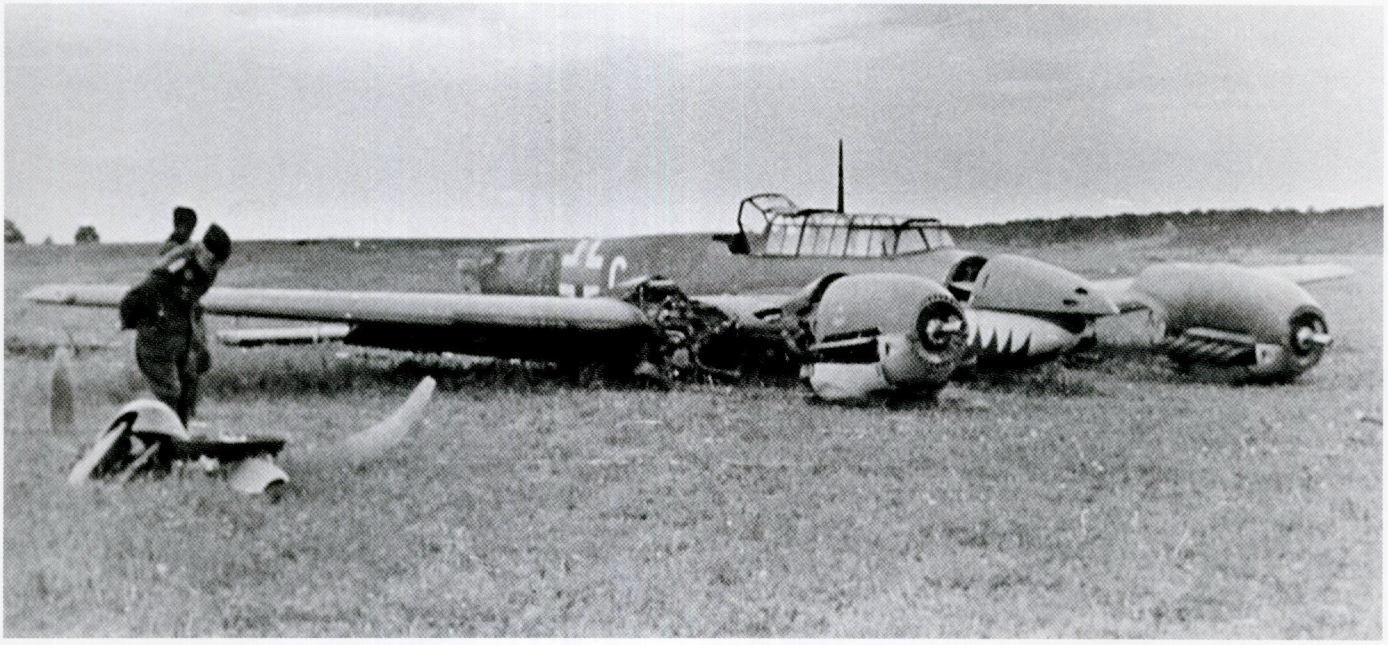
*LEFT*: A2+AL of 6./ZG 2 forms a backdrop for a meeting of the Staffel's flying crew to go through the next mission's details.

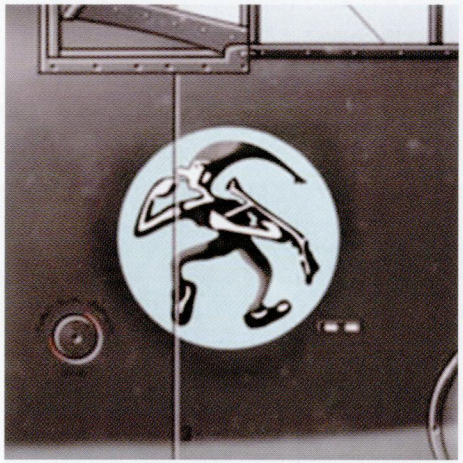
*ABOVE*: Hans-Joachim Jabs stands proudly before his Bf 110 which has its engines running.



*RIGHT*: M8+IP of Hans-Joachim Jabs over the Channel.

*BELOW*: M8+CM belly-landed by an unknown pilot. Note the first style fully-enclosed Bordfunker's central rear canopy.



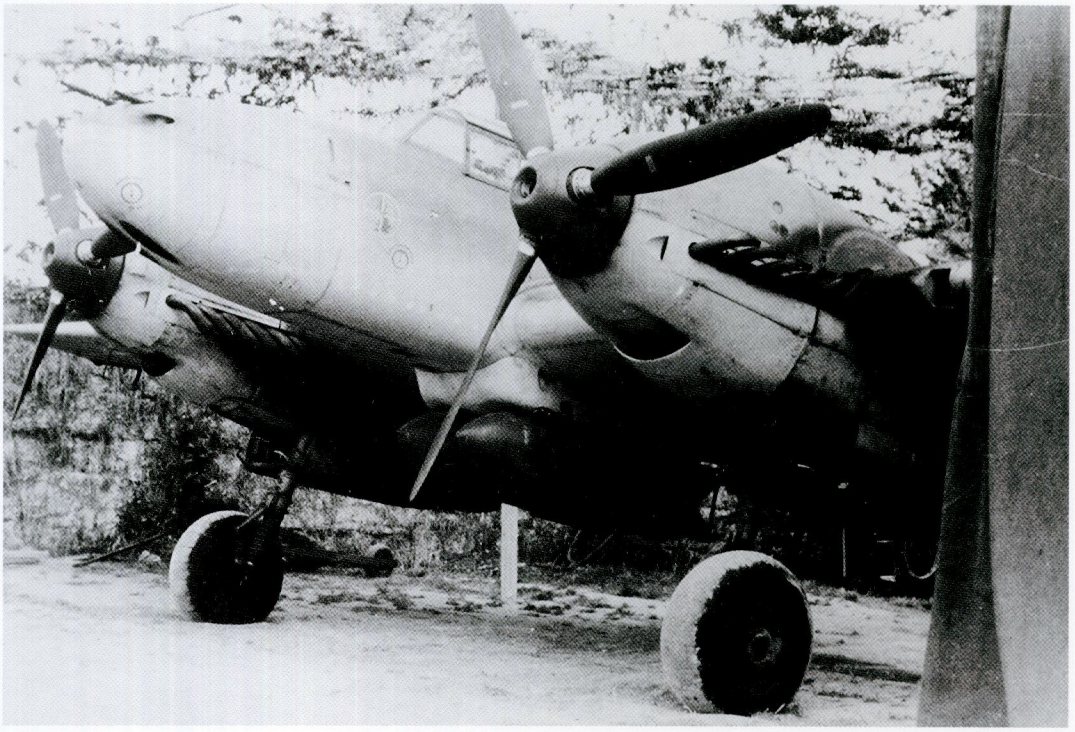


*RIGHT:* 3M+BK of 2./ZG 2, showing the later style fuselage cross. The individual aircraft letter, B, is black outlined in white.

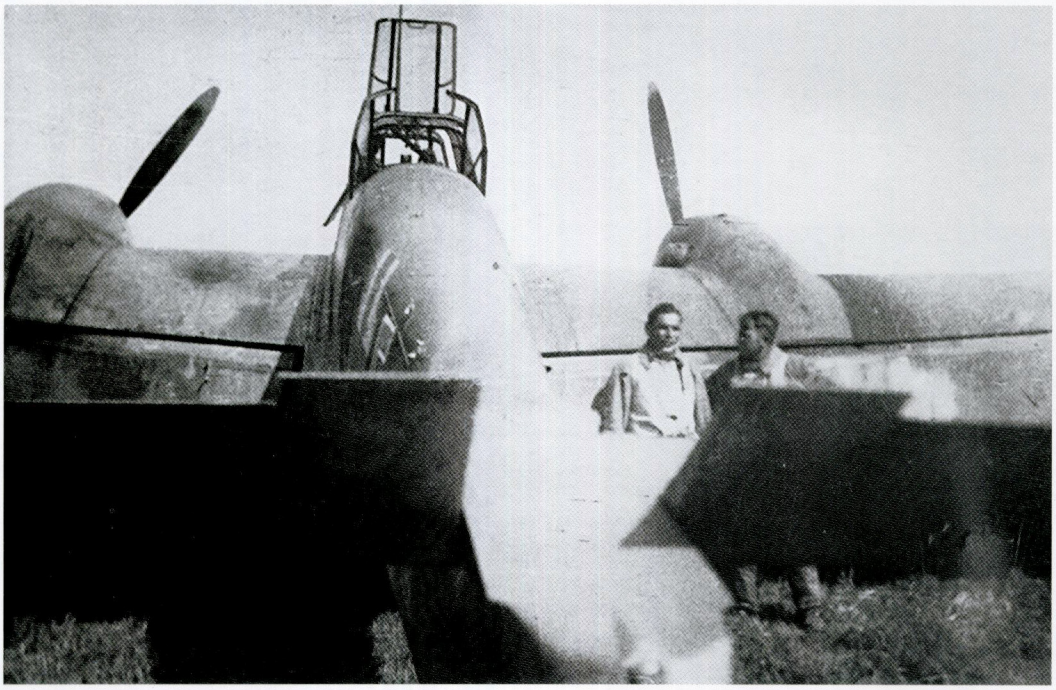
**Messerschmitt Bf 110 C of 2./ZG 2**

**Bf 110 C, 3M+BK clearly carries the 'Bernberger Jäger' emblem under the forward cockpit, and has solid camouflage down the fuselage sides. I. Gruppe of ZG 2, like II./ZG 76, appears to have retained the early style camouflage throughout the Battle of Britain.**

*LEFT*: Lt. Seehausen, pilot, and his Bordfunker, Uffz. Camehl, behind him pose for the camera in the cockpit of their Bf 110. Part of the 7./ZG 26 emblem can be seen on the fuselage.



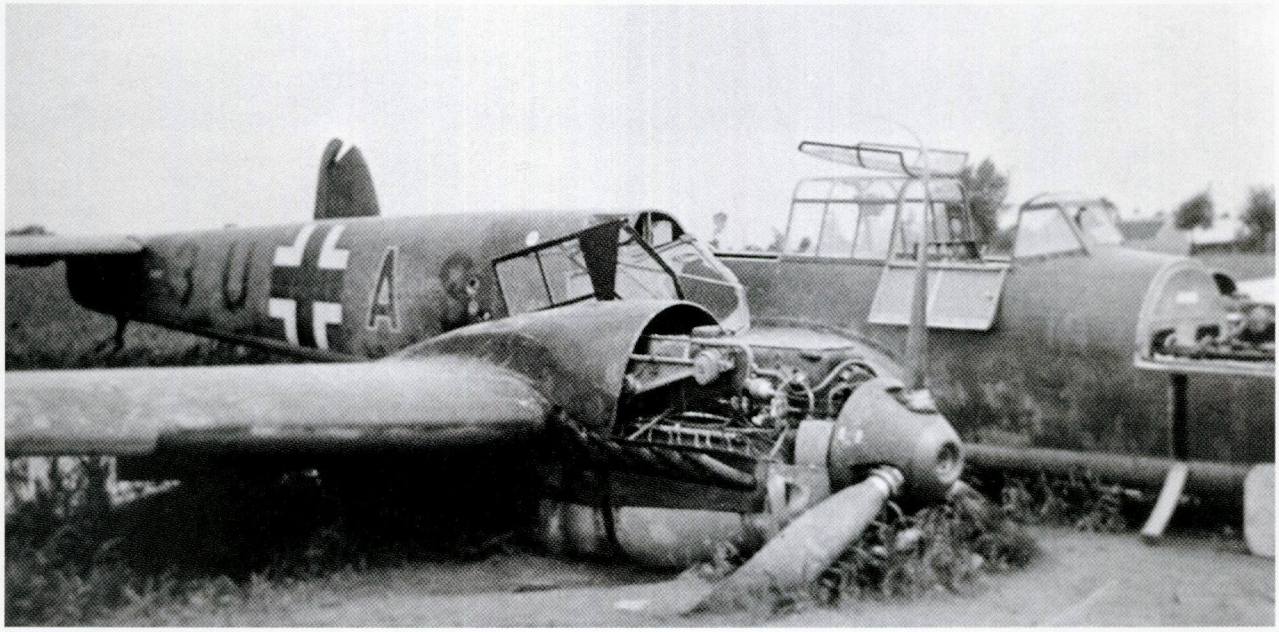
*RIGHT*: A bombed-up Bf 110 D-0 of Erprobungsgruppe 210 awaits its crew in a blast pen. The unit emblem can be clearly seen on the forward fuselage.



*LEFT*: Pilot Uffz. Balthasar Aretz, left, and his Bordfunker, Gefr. Rolf Schilleng, stand with their Bf 110 D-0, S9+EK, in the early afternoon of 31 August 1940 following the unit's attack on Croydon airfield. Bullet strikes can be seen on the fuselage and the port aileron.

*LEFT*: 3U+HR of 7./ZG 26 moves out for another escort mission during the Battle of Britain. Note the two tone upper surface camouflage on the top of the fuselage, and the yellow lower section on the starboard rudder.

*RIGHT*: 3U+AS of 8./ZG 26. Early style upper surface camouflage is carried. The spinner tip is in red, and on the forward fuselage the Staffel emblem of a sad fox can just be seen.



*LEFT*: A Bf 110 of II./ZG 76 receiving attention to its port engine and machine gun compartment.

*RIGHT*: M8+ZC of the Gruppenstab of II./ZG 76 parked among trees. Along with the Gruppenstab of V.(Z)/LG 1, the Gruppenstab of II./ZG 76 also used letters from the end of the alphabet as the individual aircraft letter for some of their Bf 110s.

## September

The tempo of the Battle was increasing, and in the early days of September, the *Zerstörer* units would begin to feel the full force of the RAF fighters ranged against them.

In the early afternoon of 1 September the '*Haifisch Gruppe*', *II./ZG 76*, were in action over England again, escorting a bomber force to Biggin Hill. *Oblt.* Herget and *Oblt.* Jabs, both to become night fighter 'Experten' later in the war, each claimed two Spitfires and a Hurricane, and on this occasion the *Gruppe* retired to France without suffering any loss. However *V.(Z)/LG 1* lost a further two machines on this mission, one crew surviving into captivity.

On 2 September the *Luftwaffe* flew almost 1,000 sorties. In an early start, *I.* and *II. Gruppen* of *ZG 26* escorted a raid targeted at airfields either side of the Thames. Five RAF squadrons rose to meet the attack, but the bomber force reached its objectives and completed its mission. Only one bomber was shot down, with two others written off upon return to base following crash-landings. The *Messerschmitt 110*s had fulfilled their task once again in getting the bombers to their target and out again, but suffered the loss of two shot down, one from each *Gruppe*, with another from *II. Gruppe* returning to France with combat damage. On this occasion the RAF fighter losses were higher than the *Zerstörer* losses in the fighter-versus-fighter combat.

A further major raid developed after midday heading towards Dover with escort this time including the two *Gruppen* of *ZG 2*. A head-to-head combat between 72 Squadron and *ZG 2* resulted in the loss of four Spitfires and three *Messerschmitt 110*s, with another managing to reach Berck-sur-Mer badly damaged. Again a creditable return for a Zestörer unit.

A raid later in the afternoon had the whole *Geschwader* of *ZG 26* over the Thames Estuary providing cover for a raid on Hornchurch. Once again, faced by Spitfires of 616 Squadron, the *Zerstörer* acquitted themselves well, with only one *Bf 110* damaged against one Spitfire shot down.

*II.* and *III./ZG 76* were airborne for escort duties for the final major mission of the day which headed in over Kent before being intercepted by seven RAF squadrons. In the combat that followed *II./ZG 76* lost its Technical Officer, *Oblt.* Karl Wrede, who was killed together with his *Bordfunker Uffz.* Richard Kukawka. Another aircraft from *7. Staffel* managed to limp back to France.

2 September had seen *Bf 110*s involved in four major raids over southern England, and in the face of vigorous defending by the RAF all of the units had reason to be satisfied with their contribution to the overall escort to bomber formations. Certainly, on this day, they had been the equal of the Spitfires and Hurricanes. The following days and weeks would paint a different picture, however.

Mid-morning on 3 September witnessed another incursion by a major *Luftwaffe* force. RAF reaction was somewhat slow and North Weald was bombed without interception. RAF fighters intercepted soon afterwards, with *I./ZG 2* and *III./ZG 26* immediately going to the aid of the bombers. The *Zerstörer* pilots fought hard to protect their charges on the homeward leg, with *I.* and *II. ZG 26* waiting further south to supplement the escort cover back to France. In the bitter fighting *I./ZG 2* lost five aircraft, two as a result of a collision. Among their five losses were three officers: *Oblt.* Reinhold Messner (*Gruppe*

Technical Officer), and *Oblt.* Kurt Müller and *Oblt.* Siegfried Gottschalt, both of *2. Staffel. III./ZG 26* lost two *Bf 110*s during the withdrawal, with a further two returning damaged, one ending up a total write-off. *I.* and *II. Gruppen* suffered no losses, with only a *3. Staffel* machine taking damage and managing to get back to France. Notwithstanding the losses, the *Bf 110*s fulfilled their mission, with the attacking bombers losing only one aircraft to the defending fighters.

4 September would prove to be a day of heavy losses for the *Zerstörer*, with both *V.(Z)/LG 1* and *ZG 76* featuring prominently. In the morning, attacks went in against the RAF's sector airfields, with a major strike developing around midday with aircraft factories as the target. *Erpr. Gr. 210*, heading towards the English coast in the direction of Littlehampton, lost its second *Gruppenkommandeur*, *Hptm.* Hans von Boltenstern, when his fighter-bomber crashed into the Channel without apparently being the subject of any attack by enemy fighters. The unit pressed on and completed its attack on the Vickers Armstrong works at Weybridge, with *V.(Z)/LG 1*, *III./ZG 76* and elements of *ZG 2* providing escort. The *Bf 110* '*Haifisch*' fighters of *II./ZG 76* were tasked to provide fighter cover on the return flight to France. On this occasion the escort was not to be so fortunate, with RAF fighters putting up vigorous opposition to this particular incursion. *14. Staffel* of *V.(Z)/LG 1* lost three aircraft while *15. Staffel* lost one with another damaged in combat. Two further officers were removed from the *Luftwaffe Zerstörer* lists with the loss of *Oblt.* Michel Junge, *Staffelkapitän* of *14. Staffel*, and *Lt.* Hans-Heinz Braukmeier of the same *Staffel*. *III./ZG 76* suffered heavily losing six fighters, counting *Oblt.* Helmut Florenz (*Gruppe Nachrichtensoffizier*), *Oblt.* Walter Schiller, *Oblt.* Hans Münich and *Oblt.* Kurt Raetsch among their losses. *II./ZG 76* had three *Bf 110*s shot down, being those of *Oblt.* Hermann Weeber (*Gruppenadjutant*), *Oblt.* Ernst-Hartmann *Freiherr* von Schlotheim and *Oblt.* Günther Piduhn, with another force-landing at Boulogne. *ZG 2* lost one aircraft, but it was that *Bf 110* of the *Geschwader*kommodore, coded 3M+AA, flown by the *Geschwaderadjutant*, *Oblt.* Wilhelm Schaefer. *ZG 2*'s *Kommodore*, *Obstlt.* Friedrich Vollbracht, had asked Schaefer to fly this mission in his stead, and once airborne, Schaefer was less than impressed to find that the engines were performing at nowhere near normal efficiency. The *Bf 110* became, in effect, a 'sitting duck' to the aggressive RAF fighters that singled it out for attention.

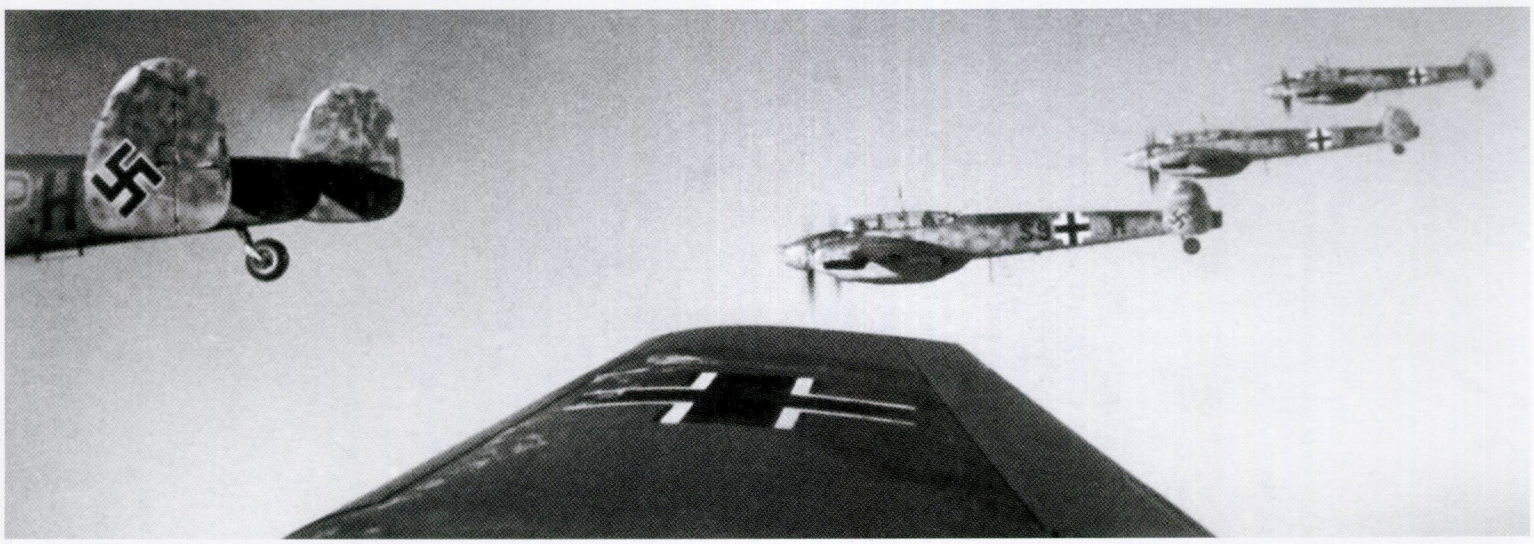
*ABOVE*: Hptm. Hans von Boltenstern, second Gruppenkommandeur of Erprobungsgruppe 210. He was lost in action on 4 September 1940 when leading the unit over the Channel.

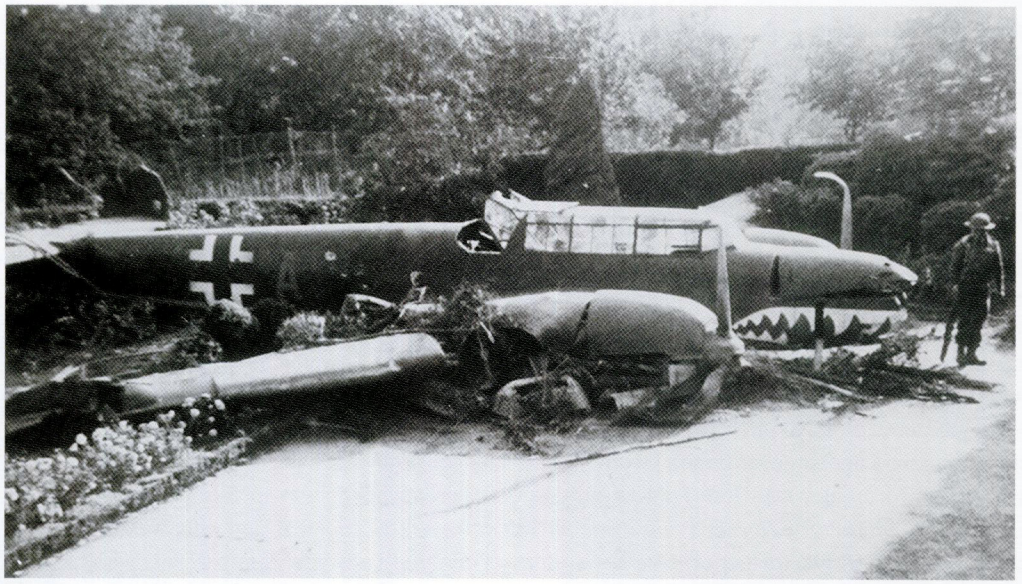
On this occasion the *Zerstörer* had suffered heavily at the hands of RAF fighters, losing 15 in combat. With another two 100 per cent losses on non-combat flights the total losses for the day were 17. This level could not be sustained.

5 September saw no losses, but on 6 September *Erpr. Gr. 210* returned to the target of two days before, the Vickers Armstrong works at Weybridge. Once again the unit suffered the loss of one *Bf 110*, a *1. Staffel* machine. On this day, *ZG 26* also lost *Bf 110*s: *Oblt.* Friedrich Viertel, *Geschwader* Technical Officer, survived into captivity after being shot down into the Channel, while *3.* and *7. Staffeln* each lost one *Bf 110*. The following day, the *Luftwaffe* would change objectives and turn its attention to the city of London, to the relief of the RAF's High Command and the benefit of its fighter airfields.

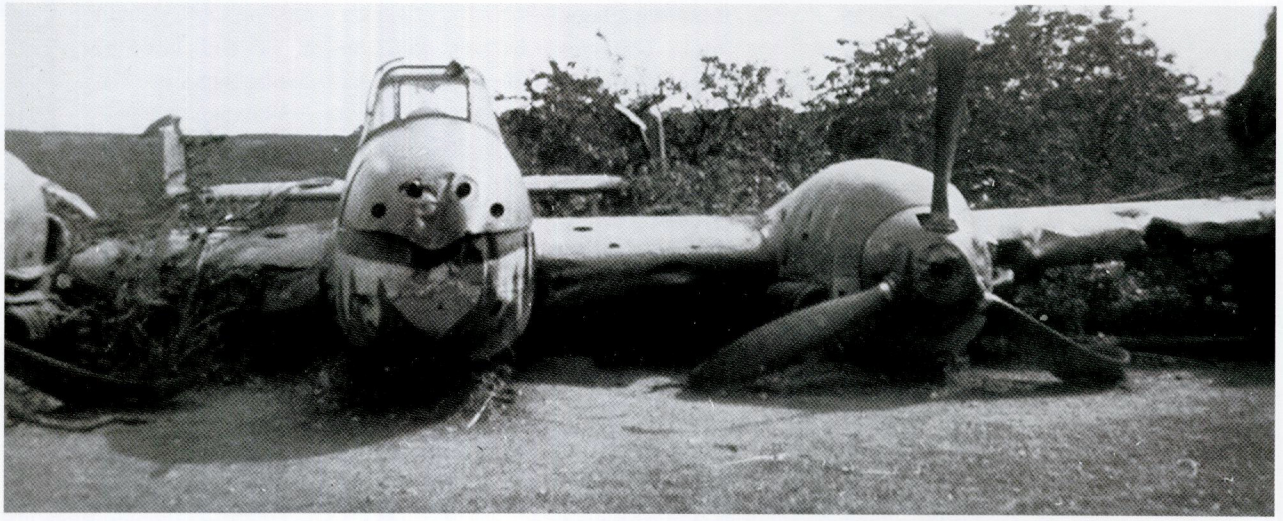
With a change in strategy on 7 September, the RAF was initially caught on the wrong foot. The further anticipated raids on airfields did not materialise, the first main raiding force ignoring the

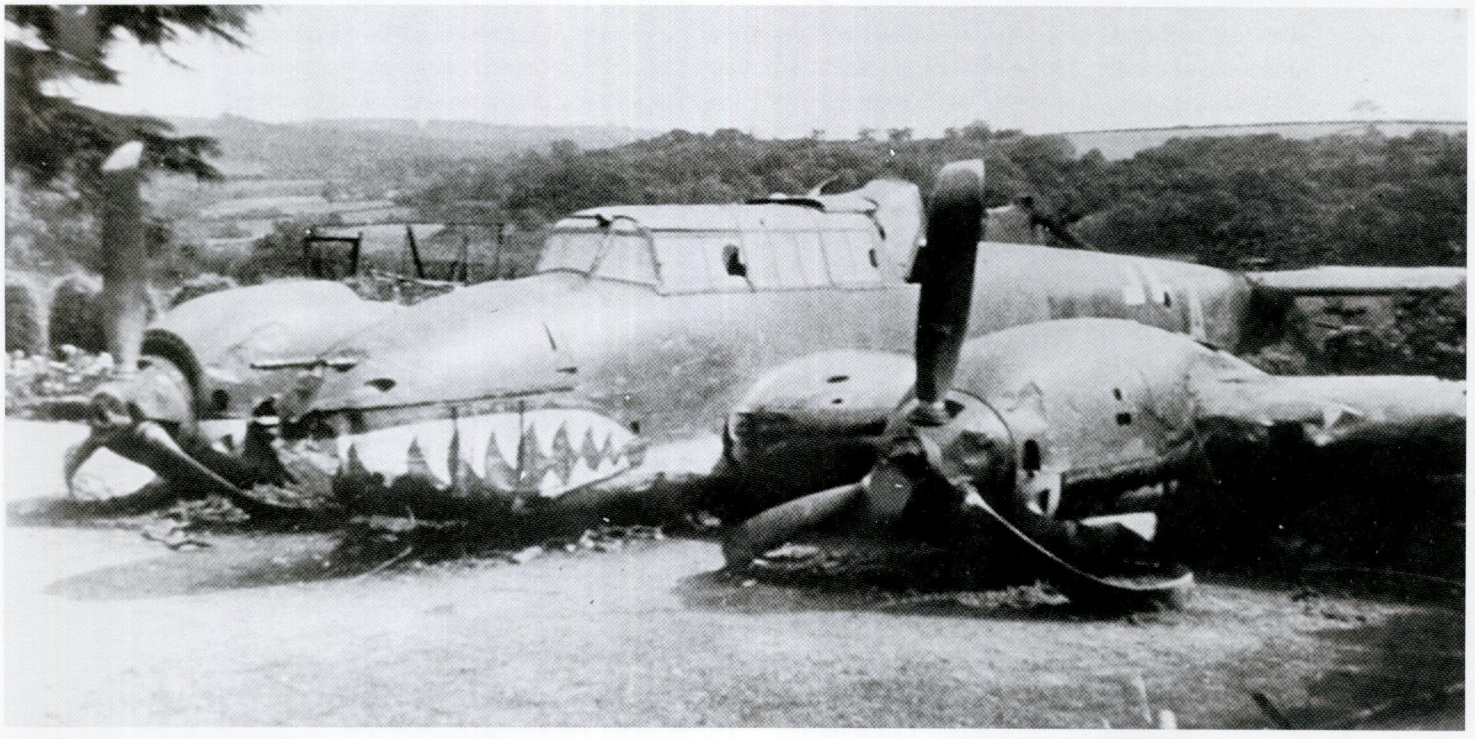
*BELOW*: Bf 110s of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210. S9+BH, identified as a Bf 110 D-0 due to its extended rear fuselage, was shot down on 6 September 1940, its pilot, Uffz. Gerhard Rüger being killed while Bordfunker, Uffz. Edmund Ernst, parachuted into captivity. The standard rear fuselage of S9+PH on the left of the photograph identifies it as one of the 30 mm Kanone-armed Bf 110 C-6s of the Staffel.





*THIS PAGE*: Three views of M8+AC of the Gruppenstab of II./ZG 76 which came to rest in the picturesque garden of Little Butts Farm, near Wadhurst on 4 September 1940. The crew of Oblt. Hermann Weeber, Gruppen-adjutant and pilot, and Uffz. Max Michel, Bordfunker survived the landing.





airfields beneath them and instead heading straight for London. Pitching close on 1,000 aircraft into the first major raid on London, *Zerstörer* from *ZG 2*, *ZG 76* and *III./ZG 26* formed part of this large armada. Set against them were 16 RAF squadrons. As the RAF progressively entered the fray, so the *Zerstörer* began to take losses. The unit most grievously hit was *ZG 2*, which lost seven *Bf 110*s. Notable among their losses was the fact that six of the seven pilots were officers: *Oblt.* Gerhard Granz (*Gruppenadjutant* of *I. Gruppe*); *Lt.* Dietrich Kislinger of *3. Staffel*; *Lt.* Kurt Schünemann (Technical Officer of *II. Gruppe*); *Lt.* Hans Dietrich Albert and *Lt.* Karl Stix of *4. Staffel* and *Oblt.* Willi Brede of *6. Staffel*. Over a period of weeks *ZG 2* had suffered repeated heavy losses, and its effectiveness as a cohesive fighting unit was now at an end. The final loss of one aircraft and one damaged in action on 11 September marks the point by which the RAF had effectively put the unit out of the Battle. Reconnaissance units suffered one *Bf 110* lost in action and two others damaged on 7 September. Far from the perceived weakening of the RAF fighter force, a view which gathered momentum in the last days of August and early days of September, the RAF appeared to be as strong as it was at the commencement of the Battle. Statistics would eventually show that the RAF fighter force was in fact stronger in numerical terms at the end of the Battle of Britain than it was when it entered the Battle at the beginning of July.

A respite on 8 September was followed by a further escort mission for *V.(Z)/LG 1* and *III./ZG 76* on the following day for the bombers of *KG 30* and *KG 53*. *V.(Z)/LG 1* lost one aircraft, with three failing to return to base from *III./ZG 76* – five of the six aircrew perished as a result.

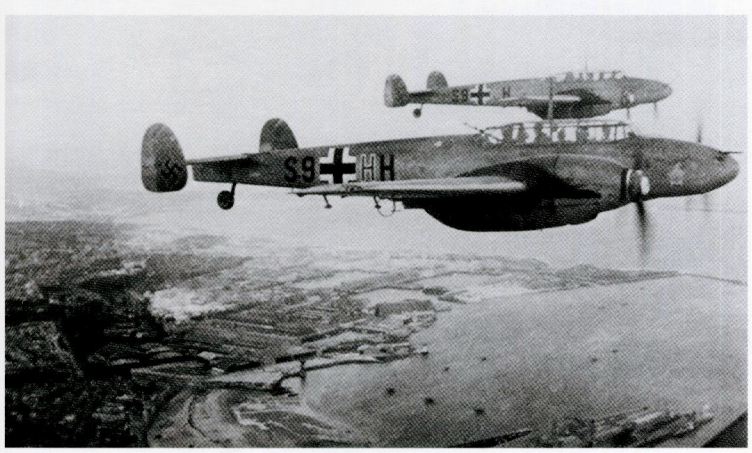
*ABOVE*: Oblt. Gerhard Granz, Gruppenadjutant of I./ZG 2, in the cockpit of his Bf 110. Granz was yet another Zerstörer pilot to spend most of the war in captivity when he was shot down on 7 September 1940.

Two days later, on 11 September, *Zerstörer* were out again in force. *Erpr. Gr. 210* had moved to Cherbourg, one of *Luftflotte 3*'s airfields, and carried out its first raid against the Spitfire works at Southampton. In strictly military terms, it carried out a superb demolition job, but on the Cunliffe-Owen works, not the Supermarine plant! Elsewhere, in a further raid against London, the main *Zerstörer* force tasked to escort duties was *ZG 26*, with elements of *V.(Z)/LG 1*, and *II.* and *III./ZG 76* also taking part. *ZG 76* had a single machine ditch into the Channel, but *ZG 26* took the brunt of the RAF's attacks, losing five aircraft across its three *Gruppen*, with another returning to Calais-Marck damaged. Further west, in the Portsmouth area, *ZG 2* suffered its last combat casualties as stated earlier.

There then followed a period of relative inactivity before action on the day that later became known as 'Battle of Britain' day: 15 September.

Of the two major raids that were undertaken by the *Luftwaffe* on 15 September, no *Zerstörer* participated in the first. In the mid-afternoon, raid, however, *V.(Z)/LG 1* took part, and in the fiercest opposition yet put up by the RAF, a further three *Bf 110*s were lost, including that of the *Staffelkapitän* of *13. Staffel*, *Oblt.* Helmut Müller, and *Lt.* Hugo Ademetz of *14. Staffel*. Müller was a *Zerstörer* 'ace', with at least eight victory claims, starting on 12 May, and including three on 8 August. Interestingly, all three *Bf 110*s are given as 'C-3' variants in the loss lists although the one aircraft with a *Werk Nummer* identified as 3802 would appear to come from a 'D' series production block.

Following 15 September, activity tailed right off until 24 September, when *Erpr. Gr. 210* once again set out for the Spitfire works. Exhibiting a singular lack of success in hitting this particular target, the unit lost one *Bf 110 D* shot down into the Channel. Two *Staffeln* of *ZG 76* had mixed fortunes on this day: two *Bf 110*s of *4. Staffel* returned to base damaged after being hit by AA fire over Southampton while two aircraft of *8. Staffel* were shot down by AA fire in the same area, one crew surviving. *II. Gruppe* of *ZG 76* had fought hard and well during the Battle of Britain, with *Gruppenkommandeur* Erich Groth claiming victories into double figures, and becoming a recipient of the Ritterkreuz (Knights Cross of the Iron Cross). Others to go on to later fame were Heinz Nacke, who made a triple claim on 30 August, Hans-Joachim Jabs, who made triple claims on 1 September and again on the 4th, Walter Borchers, who achieved double figures and




*BELOW*: S9+HH and S9+CH of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210 over Cherbourg Harbour, September 1940. Note the personal emblem on the nose of S9+HH. S9+HH was shot down into the Channel on 24 September 1940, taking to their deaths the pilot, Lt. Ulrich Freiherr von der Horst and Bordfunker Ogefr. Franz Öllers.

*THIS PAGE*: Two views of U8+HL, W. Nr. 1372, a Bf 110 C-1 crewed by Fw. Hermann Brinkmann, pilot, and Uffz. Erwin Grüschow, Bordfunker, when it was shot down on 11 September. It carries a mix of the early style solid two tone camouflage on the fuselage sides, and the white nose and small rear fuselage band applied to aircraft of I. Gruppe of this unit in the latter stages of the Battle of Britain. Of interest is the small locomotive painted below the windscreen.

claimed three on 4 September, and Wilhelm Herget, most of whose 13 victories during the Battle came at the end of August and early September, with three claimed on 1 September.

On 25 September *ZG 26* provided fighter cover for a bombing force from *KG 55* in an attack on the Bristol Aeroplane works at Filton, near Bristol. The bombers reached their objective and carried out their bombing mission, while the *Zerstörer* tangled with defending fighters. *III. Gruppe* lost two *Bf 110*s, one belly-landing in England while the other was shot down into the Channel with the crew being rescued by the German air-sea rescue service. The *Staffelkapitän* of *7. Staffel*, *Oblt.* Ernst Matthes, managed to get his *Bf 110* back to Cherbourg, force-landing there on one engine. Another *Bf 110* of the unit crashed on landing at Theville following combat. A further *Bf 110* of *7.(F)/LG 2* was shot down over England. The Spitfire works were finally hit on the following day, when *Erpr. Gr. 210*, in conjunction with two *Gruppen* of *KG 55*, launched a further attack. *ZG 26* suffered the loss of two further *Bf 110*s, one of which was flown by *Lt.* Kuno-Adalbert Konopka.

*ABOVE*: L2+ER, W. Nr. 2185, a Bf 110 C-5 of 7.(F)/LG 2, shot down and crashed at Baldslaw on 25 September. The crew of Oblt. Eberhard Weyergang, pilot, and Bordfunker Fw. Gustav Nelson did not survive.

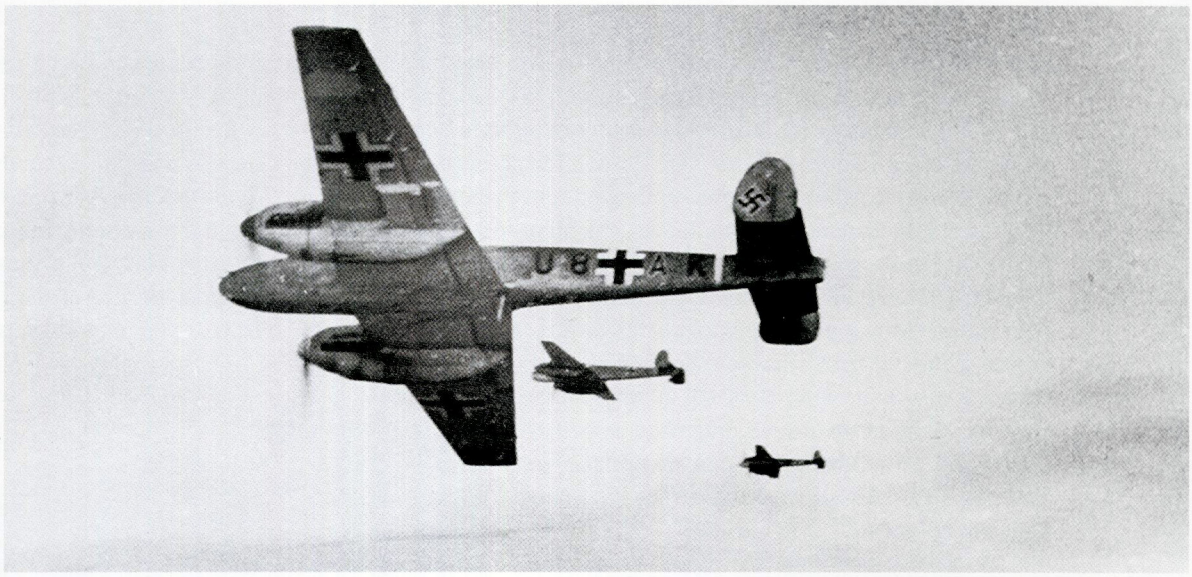
27 September was to prove to be the concluding operational day for *V.(Z)/LG 1*. In concert with *II.* and *III./ZG 76* they provided fighter escort for *Ju 88*s of *I./KG 77*. RAF fighters put up a spirited defence. While *ZG 76* lost one aircraft and had another damaged, *V.(Z)/LG 1* was decimated. Of the ten serviceable *Bf 110*s taking part in the mission, seven were shot down. Included in the losses were *Gruppenkommandeur Hptm.* Horst Liensberger; *Oblt.* Ulrich Freiherr von Gravenreuth, *Staffelkapitän* of *15. Staffel*, and *Oblt.* Otto Weckeiser of the same *Staffel*. *II./ZG 76* lost its *Gruppenadjutant*, *Oblt.* Wilhelm von Eichhorn, shot down into the Channel, but surviving into British captivity, and *9. Staffel*'s *Fw.* Hans Peterburs, a future Ritterkreuzträger with *ZG 1* on the Russian front, crash-landed his *Bf 110* near Dieppe.

Further west, towards midday, ten *Bf 110*s of *Erpr. Gr. 210* headed out over the Channel. One of their number turned back with engine trouble. Pressing on, with escort from *ZG 26*, they were intercepted inland and did not reach the intended target, the Parnall Aircraft Factory at Yate, near Bristol. Attempting to extricate itself from the intercepting RAF fighters, the unit fled south, and in the minutes following lost four aircraft. The third *Gruppenkommandeur* of the unit, *Hptm.* Martin Lutz, a Legion Condor veteran, was killed when his *Bf 110 D* crashed at Tarrant Gunville, and the unit also suffered the loss of the *Staffelkapitän* of *2. Staffel*, *Oblt.* Wilhelm-Richard Roßiger. *ZG 26* suffered equally badly, losing six aircraft. Among the losses were the *Gruppenadjutant* of *III. Gruppe*, *Oblt.* Hans Barschel, shot down into the Channel and posted as missing, and *Oblt.* Arthur Niebuhr, *Staffelkapitän* of *4. Staffel*, killed in action. *Gefr.* Georg Jakstadt, a pilot of *9. Staffel*, carried out a head-on attack on a Spitfire of 609 Squadron. Both pilots pulled upwards to avoid the opposing aircraft, resulting in a collision that would have had a closing speed of around 600 miles per hour. The RAF pilot, P/O Miller, and Jakstadt's *Bordfunker*, *Gefr.* Emil Liedtke were killed in the crash, but in one of the most miraculous escapes of the Battle, Jakstadt managed to extricate himself from the shattered machine and land safely to spend the rest of the war as a prisoner.

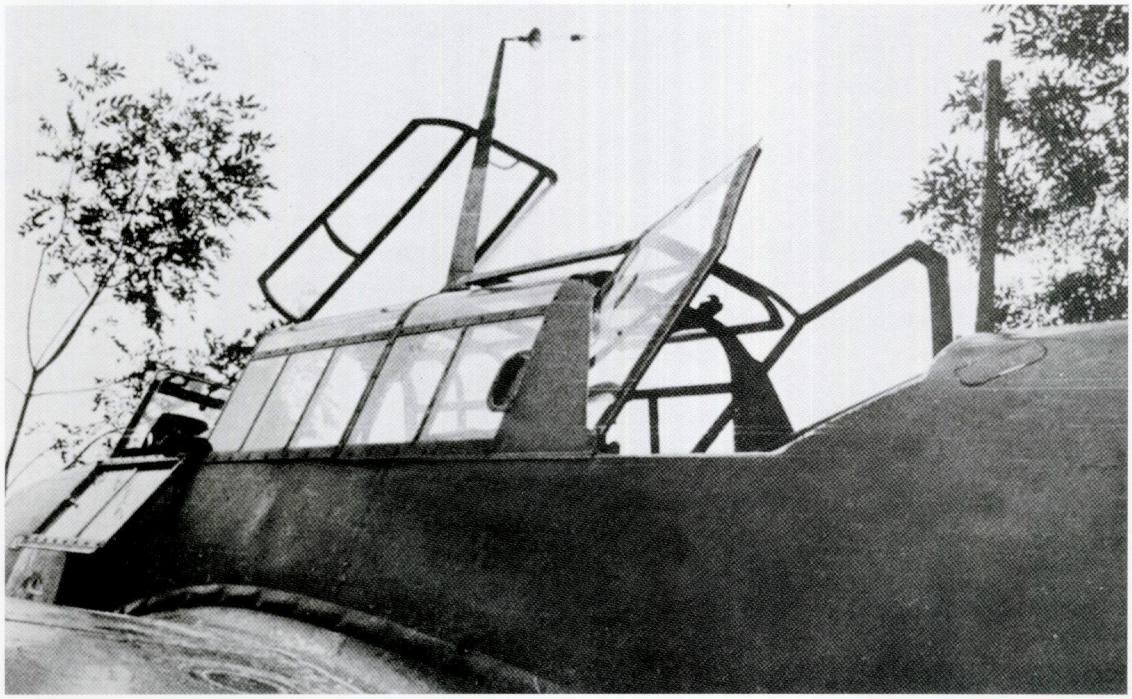
*BELOW*: Gefr. Georg Jakstadt, pilot, (left) and Bordfunker Gefr. Emil Lidtke were involved in a spectacular collision over Dorset on 27 September. Their Bf 110, 3U+FT of 9./ZG 26, collided head-on with the Spitfire of Pilot Officer Miller of 609 Squadron, only Jakstadt surviving. He managed to extricate himself from the flying wreckage of his Bf 110 and parachute into captivity.

It had been a hard year for *III./ZG 26*. However, the *Gruppe* had also produced its share of 'aces', with *Oblt.* Sophus Baagoe of *8. Staffel* in double figures. The *Gruppenstab* pilots of Major Johann Schalk, *Gruppenkommandeur*, and *Lt.* Botho Sommer also reached 'ace' status. In *7. Staffel Lt.* Kuno-Adalbert Konopka and *Fw.* Helmut Haugk both passed the 'ace' figure of five, while in *8. Staffel*, *Lt.* Siegfried Kuhrke and *Uffz.* Walter Scherer scored above the magical figure.

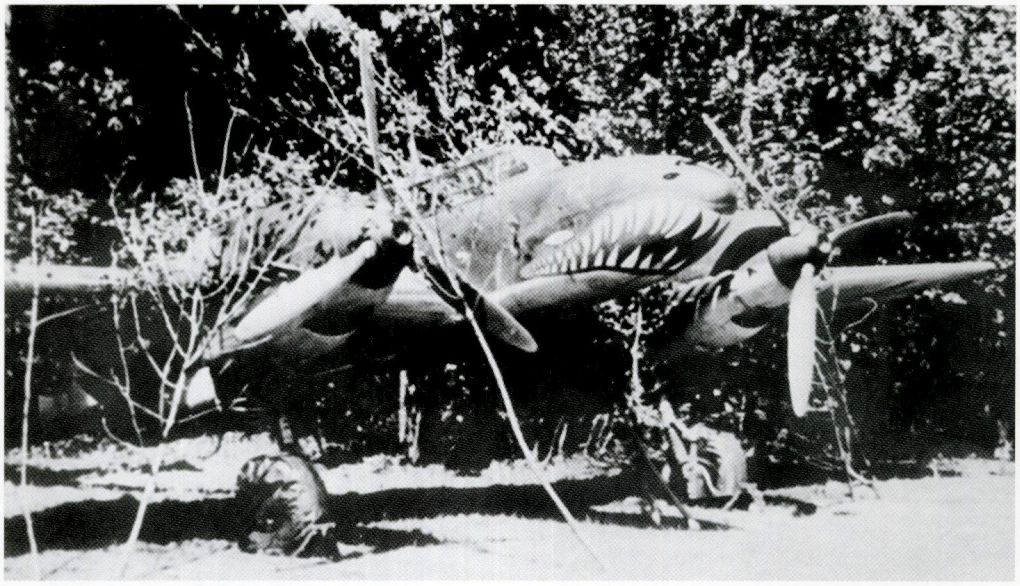
The odd sporadic mission followed up to the end of the month. September had proved to be the month when the fears of a few became reality. In hard-fought combat the young *Zerstörer* crews fought as valiantly as their single-engined colleagues. However the shortcomings of the *Bf 110* design as a day fighting machine against modern single-engined enemy fighters were exposed in the skies over southern England. Many crews paid with their lives bringing this fact into sharp focus; two units, *ZG 2* and *V.(Z)/LG 1* had been practically wiped out and took no further part in operations against England.




*RIGHT*: Nearest the camera is U8+AK, a Bf 110 D, with a small white band around the rear fuselage.

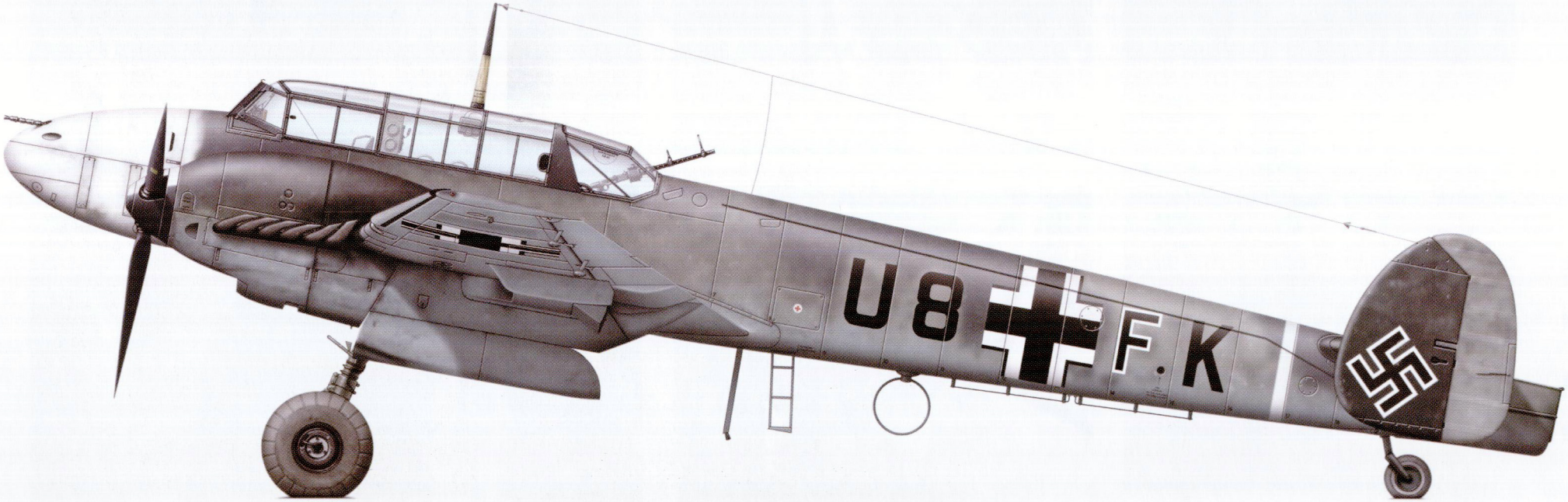


*LEFT*: Close-up view of the rear canopy of a Bf 110. Note that the central rear panel has been completely removed. This could have been done to provide a greater field of fire for the Bordfunker, or to facilitate baling out – a jammed rear canopy meant almost certain death for the Bordfunker in a crippled Bf 110.



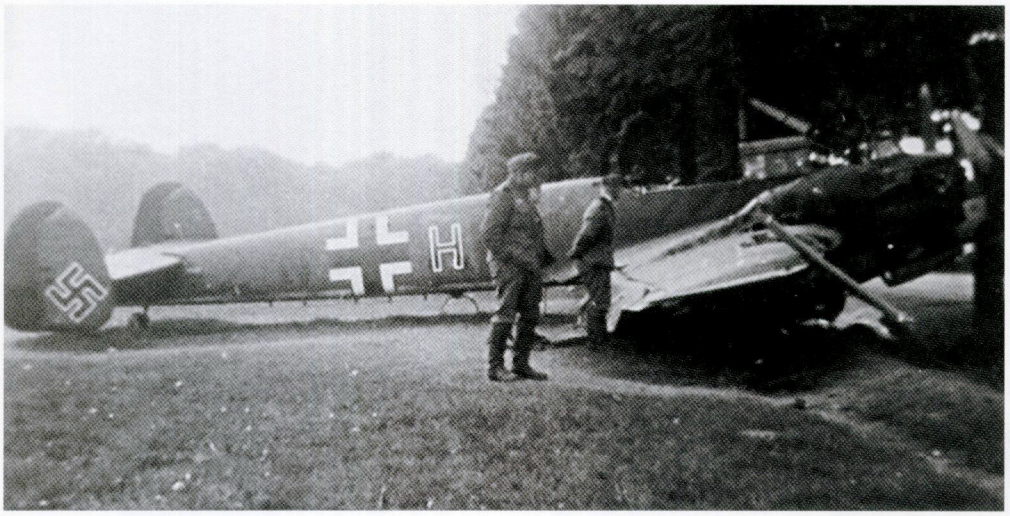
*LEFT*: A Sharksmouth of II./ZG 76 almost completely hidden from the air. It carries the solid camouflage all the way down the fuselage sides, a feature of this Gruppe throughout the Battle of Britain, and teeth in the mouth that are closer together than was normally the case with this emblem.

*BELOW*: Aircraft of 2./ZG 26 in the later stages of the Battle of Britain. Of note are the whitewashed noses of the aircraft, and the small white band on the rear fuselage of U8+FK. Note that the whitewash on the nose of U8+FK does not extend as far back as that on the nose of the Bf 110 nearest the camera. The extended rear fuselage of U8+FK points to it being a ('D' variant.)

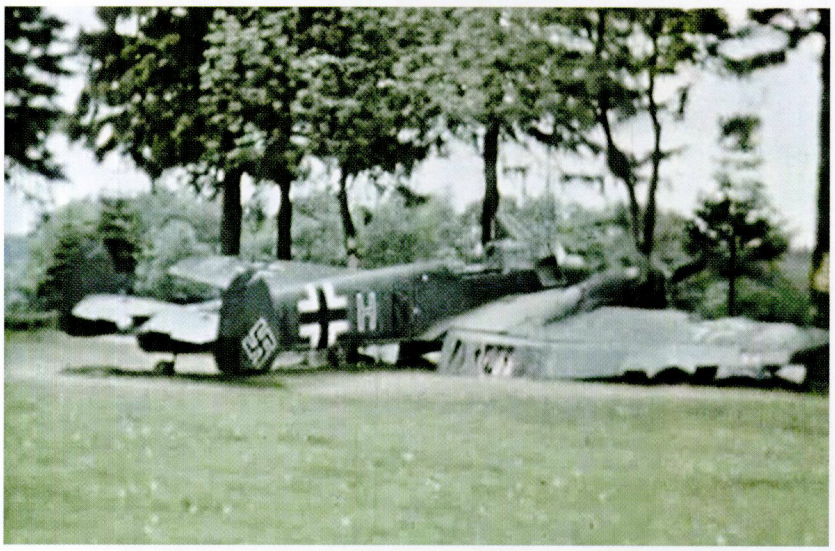


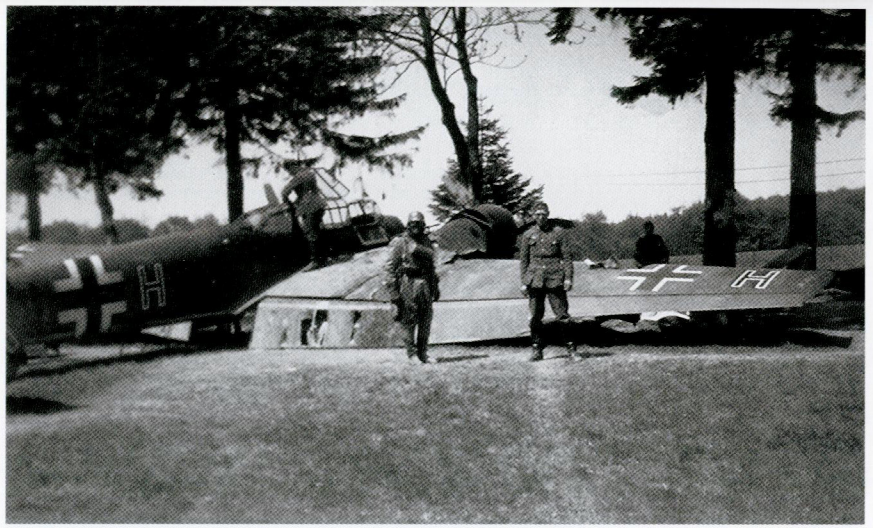

**Messerschmitt Bf 110 D of 2./ZG 26**

**U8+FK shows the revised camouflage seen on ZG 26 machines in the later stages of the Battle of Britain. The extended rear fuselage of the 'D' variant can be seen. Solid two-tone green camouflage is no longer carried on the fuselage sides, and tactical markings of a white painted nose and a thin white band around the rear fuselage are carried. Note the difference in application of the white nose on U8+FK with that of the aircraft nearest the camera. The individual aircraft letter 'F' is black outlined in white. Of interest is the fact that the port fin and engine cowling are still painted in solid colours.**



*THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE*: Six views of 2N+HN, a Bf 110 C-2 with the W. Nr. 3513. The aircraft was brought to a halt on the edge of Laval airfield on 17 September 1940, the crew emerging unscathed.

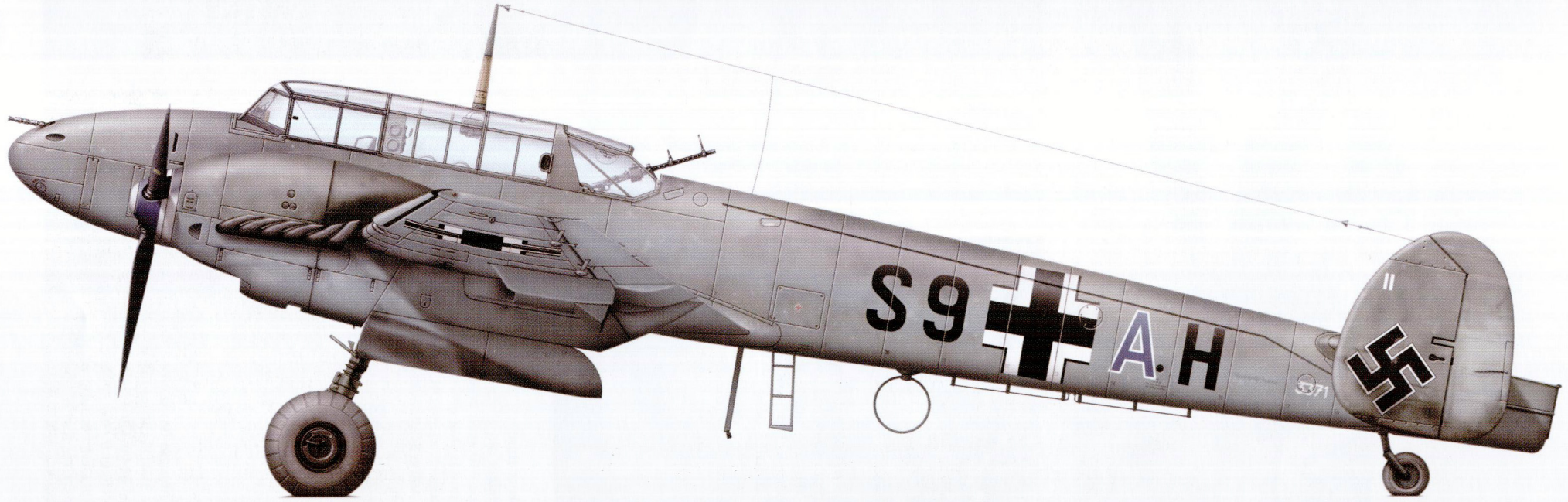




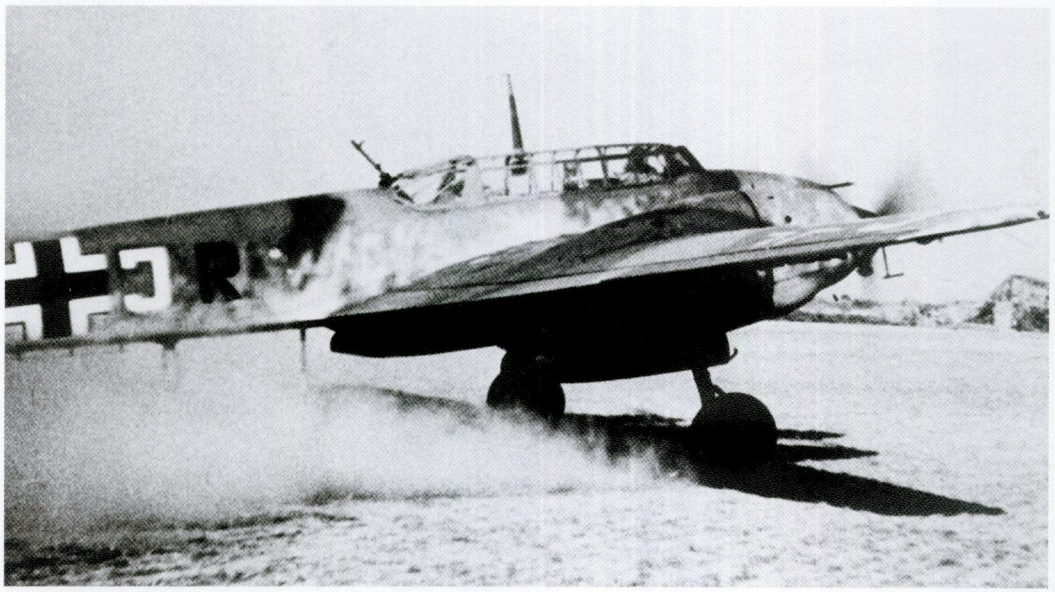
**Messerschmitt Bf 110 C-2 of 8./ZG 76**

**2N+HN, W. Nr. 3513, carries the early style of upper surface camouflage coupled with the larger fuselage cross and the swastika on the fin only. The letter 'H' is in the Staffel colour of red, as are the spinner tips. This aircraft does not carry the 'three wasps above a cloud' Gruppe emblem normally seen on the nose of Bf 110s of III./ZG 76.**

*THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE*: Four views of S9+AH, Bf 110 D-0, W. Nr. 3371 of Hptm. Martin Lutz, Gruppenkommandeur of Erprobungsgruppe 210. The 'A' in the fuselage code is blue outlined in white. Note, however, that in one of the views the nose of the aircraft carries the letter 'J', indicating that at some point it has had its individual aircraft letter changed from 'J' to 'A'. This aircraft was Lutz's when he was Staffelkapitän of 1. Staffel, and he took it with him upon becoming Gruppenkommandeur of the unit. These views were taken at Octeville airfield in September 1940 and most probably near the end of the month. The damage to this aircraft, and the fact it would be unfit for flying for a time, would probably explain why Martin Lutz was flying 'S9+DH' when he was shot down on 27 September 1940. Note the two victory bars on the fin; one in the Spanish Civil War and the other in July 1940.

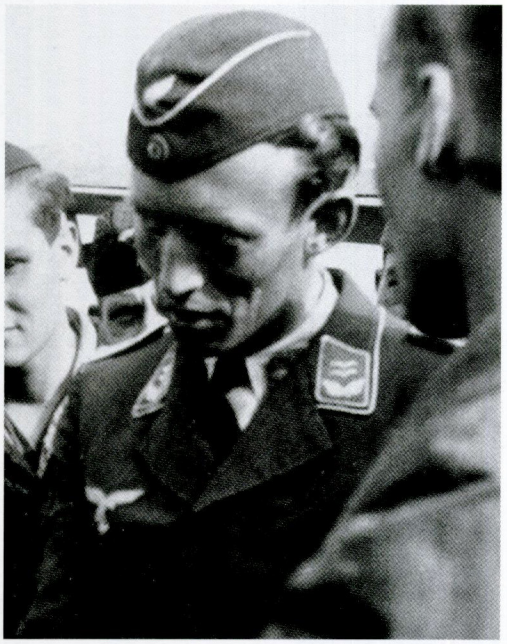



**Messerschmitt Bf 110 D-0/B of Gruppenstab/Erpr. Gr. 210**
S9+AH, W. Nr. 3371, is the aircraft of Hauptmann Martin Lutz, which he took with him when he moved from the post of Staffelkapitän of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210 to become the unit's Gruppenkommandeur. It has a light mottle over the upper surfaces of the fuselage sides, with mottle also on the fin and rudder. The individual aircraft letter is in blue, standard practice for 1. Staffel aircraft of this unit, and white/blue/white propeller spinners are evident. The unit emblem is carried, and interestingly, the letter 'J' can be seen on the nose, indicating that at some time the aircraft's individual letter was changed from 'J' to 'A'.

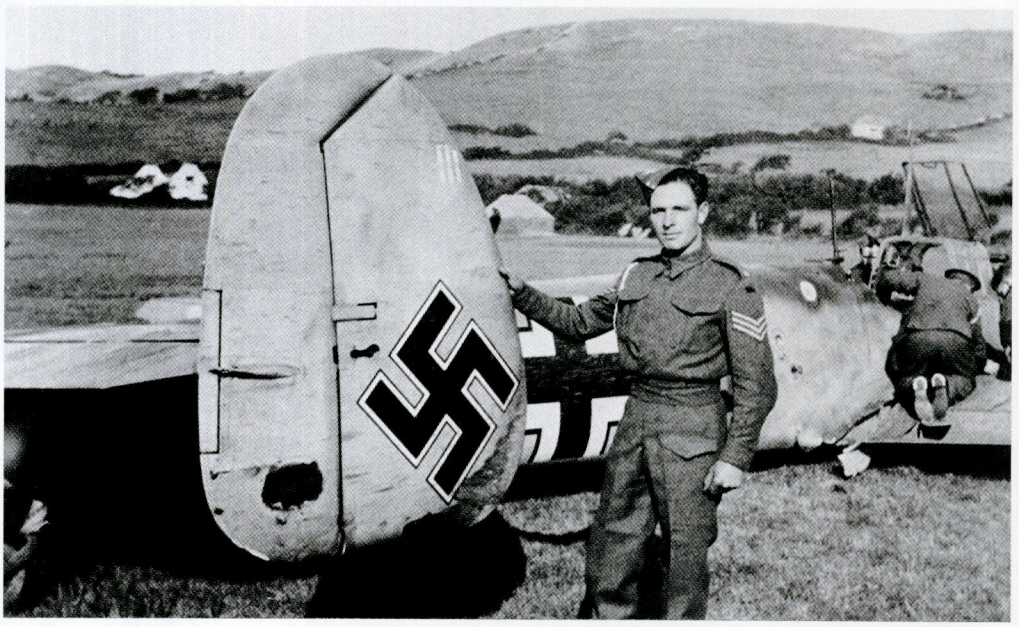


*LEFT*: 3U+JR, a Bf 110 C-2, of the Staffelkapitän of 7./ZG 26, Oblt. Ernst Matthes. Matthes belly-landed this aircraft back at Cherbourg on 25 September 1940 on one engine following combat with a Spitfire over England.

*BELOW*: Major Schalk, Gruppenkommandeur of III./ZG 26 photographs the fin and rudder of an aircraft of the unit while Oblt. Barschel, Gruppenadjutant, looks on. Barschel was killed in action on 27 September.



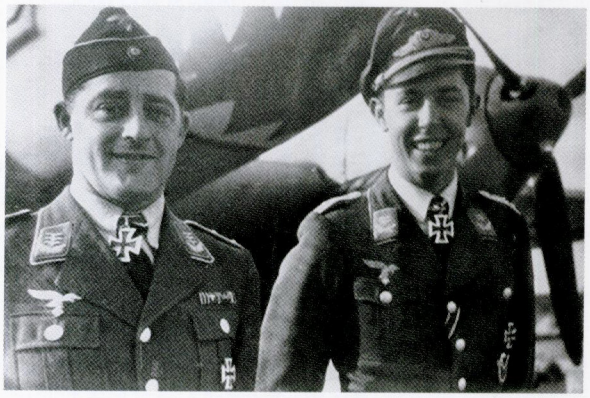
*ABOVE*: Martin Lutz, third Gruppenkommandeur of Erprobungsgruppe 210, seen here as an Oberleutnant. Lutz was shot down and killed on 27 September in S9+DH, his Bordfunker Uffz. Anton Schön was also killed in the crash.



*RIGHT*: Also brought down on 27 September, 3U+DS carries three victory bars on its fin. The fuselage side has a very light mottle applied. The crew of Uffz. Fritz Schupp, pilot, and Bordfunker, Gefr. Karl Nechwatel, survived the landing at Kimmeridge.

# October to end of year

Operations by *Bf 110* units from the start of October were on a reduced basis. This was due to several factors, not least of which was the overall *Luftwaffe* strategy following the postponement of the invasion as well as the diminishing number of units available, and within those remaining, the failure of the supply organisation to fully replace the losses suffered by the front line units. This latter point can be illustrated by the fact that Wilhelm Schaefer, *Geschwaderadjutant* of *ZG 2*, did not fly a single mission from ditching into the Channel on 11 August until the mission on which he was shot down over England on 4 September, simply because of a lack of aircraft in his unit. And even then he was flying the *Geschwader*kommodore's *Bf 110*, not an aircraft freshly issued to the unit. Additionally, *Erpr. Gr. 210* could only muster ten *Bf 110*s for the raid of 27 September when the *Gruppenstab*, 1. and *2. Staffeln* should normally have been able to field double that number. Such was the parlous state of things in *Zerstörer* units in the later stages of the Battle.



*ABOVE*: Two 'Ritterkreuzträger' of II./ZG 76. Left is Hptm. Groth with Oblt. Jabs alongside, both displaying the Knight's Crosses they were awarded on 1 October.

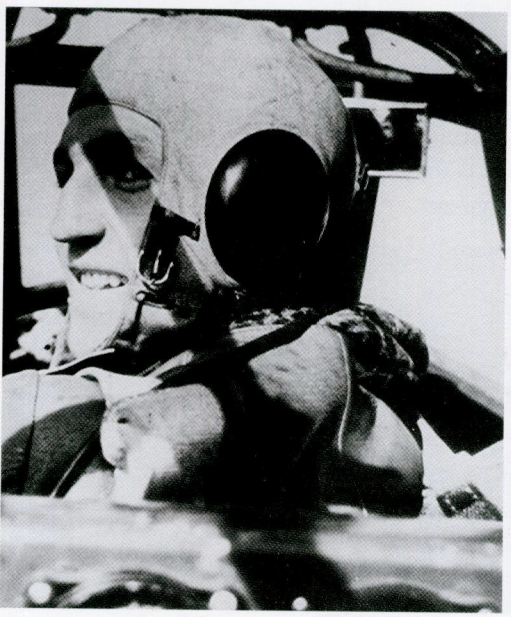
As mentioned, October saw minimal activity for *Bf 110* units, but on 5 October *Erpr. Gr. 210* headed inland over Kent to attack Beckton Gasworks (*1. Staffel*) and West Malling airfield (*2. Staffel*). Intercepted before reaching their targets, *1. Staffel* had two aircraft shot down, including that of the acting-*Gruppenkommandeur Oblt.* Werner Weymann. Two more *Bf 110*s of the unit, one from each *Staffel*, crash-landed back in France.

Two days later, *II.* and *III./ZG 26* provided escort for *Ju 88*s of *II./KG 51* on a mission to attack the Westland aircraft works at Yeovil. RAF fighters hit the *Zerstörer* hard, with *II. Gruppe* having three aircraft shot down and *III. Gruppe* losing four. Among *III. Gruppe*'s losses were *Lt.* Botho Sommer, *Gruppenadjutant*, *Oblt.* Hubert Grisslich and *Lt.* Kurt Sidow.

The unit returns for the days following were bereft of any entries relating to combat loss or damage, the next incident being a *Bf 110* of *III./ZG 76* damaged in combat on 17 October. *Erpr. Gr. 210* continued to carry out sporadic missions, including one on this day and another on 27 October. The major thrust of *Luftwaffe* incursions in October appeared to be high-level indiscriminate attacks by *Messerschmitt 109 Staffeln* which had been converted to the fighter-bomber role. In comparative terms, what had gone before in the preceding months compared to October was like switching from a sledgehammer to a pin-prick.

The *Bf 110 Staffeln* of *Erpr. Gr. 210* were over London again on 29 October, and although *Fw.* Siegfried Tröppl, who had previously served with *V.(Z)/LG 1*, managed to get his damaged aircraft down at St. Ingelvert, both he and *Bordfunker Uffz.* Otto Büttner died. This drew down the curtain over the period that was to be known later as the Battle of Britain.

*BELOW*: Wolfgang Schenck in the cockpit of a Bf 110. Schenck flew in the Polish and Western campaigns, being wounded on 16 May. He returned to flying on 4 September with 1./Erpr. Gr. 210. He then flew on the Russian front with SKG 210 and ZG 1, and later led the development of the Me 262 as a fighter-bomber as head of 'Kommando Schenck' in mid-1944. His last flying duty was as Geschwader-kommodore of KG 51 flying Me 262s. He was a recipient of the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves.



Into October, the reconnaissance *Bf 110* units continued their unstinting and relatively unrecognised work, and this continued into the following month, with a *Bf 110 C-5* from *1.(F)/Auf. Gr. 22* being damaged on 1 November, and a C-5 from *3.(F)/Auf Gr. 11* being shot down into the Channel off Ramsgate on 7 November. Two days earlier, *II./ZG 76*, now transferred to northern Europe, had a *4. Staffel* machine shot down by an RAF Hudson bomber. *1.(F)/Auf. Gr. 22* continued its reconnaissance work, and paid the price when it lost two *Bf 110 C-5*s to Spitfires of 19 Squadron on 15 November.

Meanwhile *Erpr. Gr. 210* had reverted to the role it had undertaken when it first entered the Battle of Britain in July: attacks on shipping. Having lost four *Gruppenkommandeur*e (three substantive and one 'acting'), the unit was now commanded by *Major* Karl-Heinz Lessmann, former *Gruppenkommandeur* of *II./ZG 2*, with no experience of flying a fighter-bomber *Messerschmitt Bf 110* whatsoever. The *Bf 110*s of *Erpr. Gr. 210* were therefore led by Wolfgang Schenck, who would rise to prominence with *ZG 1* on the Russian Front and later head up '*Kommando Schenck*' to evaluate the *Me 262* as a fighter-bomber, and serve out his last combat posting as *Geschwaderkommodore* of *KG 51* on the *Me 262*.

On 17 November, *Erpr. Gr. 210* set out to attack the RAF airfield at Wattisham. However the unit never reached its target, and lost three aircraft to 17 Squadron Hurricanes, one almost getting back to the safety of France, but crashing into the Channel off Dunkirk with the loss of both crewmen.

*Erpr. Gr. 210* had fought as hard as any *Zerstörer* unit, and on the outward leg of its missions was encumbered with the additional burden of bombs. Losing four *Kommandeure* between 15 August and 5 October, the unit's efforts would be recognised by the posthumous award of the '*Ritterkreuz*' to three of its *Zerstörer* officers: *Hptm.* Walter Rubensdörffer, *Hptm.* Martin Lutz and *Oblt.* Wilhelm-Richard Roßiger.

As the month wore on, the occasional *Zerstörer* loss was suffered, with the most unusual being a *Bf 110 C-5* from the *Geschwader*stab of *Stukageschwader 1,* coded A5+AA, ostensibly the aircraft of the *Geschwaderkommodore*. This was shot down by Spitfires of 603 Squadron off Ramsgate on 29 November. It was the practice for *Stuka* units to have reconnaissance aircraft attached to them, normally forming the '*Stabsstaffel*'.

*ABOVE*: Oblt. Wilhelm-Richard Roßiger, Staffelkapitän of 2./Erpr. Gr. 210 , being congratulated on the completion of his 100th mission. Note that the Bordfunker's central rear canopy has been completely removed on this aircraft, a feature that became more common during 1940. Roßiger was posted missing in action after being shot down into the Channel on 27 September in S9+GK.

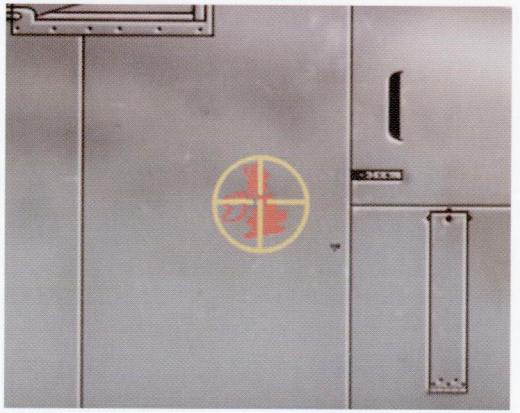
December saw the odd sporadic combat as the year petered out, a year that began with the *Zerstörer* crews and units knowing success only through the Polish campaign in September 1939 and the brush with RAF Wellingtons in December 1939. The north European campaign in the spring of 1940 upped the tempo, and the western campaign of May/June 1940 saw the *Zerstörer* units come into regular contact for the first time with RAF fighters that exposed the shortcomings of the aircraft. The Battle of Britain would prove to be the campaign that would pit the young *Zerstörer* crews not only against the relative 'greenhorns' of the regular RAF, but also against battle hardened veterans who had opposed the *Luftwaffe* in previous campaigns in the shape of French, Czech and, in particular, Polish pilots. This mix, coupled with RDF which time after time helped to direct RAF fighters onto incoming *Luftwaffe* formations, would be the rock upon which wave after wave of *Zerstörer* crashed. The *Zerstörer* crews in 1940 set about their task as vigorously as their *Bf 109* counterparts and, contrary to popular myth, the pure fighter units never received fighter escort themselves. Their lot was always as escort to bombing formations, many times penetrating deeper into enemy territory than *Bf 109* units due to the latter's shorter range. The only *Zerstörer* unit to have fighter escort was the bomb-carrying *Bf 110 D*s and *E*s of *Erpr.Gr. 210*. The relative success of that unit in hitting its allotted targets pointed the way forward as to the future use of the *Bf 110* as a strike aircraft. This was borne out later by the exploits of *Schnellkampfgeschwader* 210 and *Zerstörergeschwader 1* on the Russian Front from 1941 onwards. It remains in the realms of conjecture as to how the Battle of Britain would have evolved over the summer of 1940 had all *Zerstörer* units operated in a fighter-bomber role. It is very likely that the battering which RAF airfields took from 12 August onwards would have been greatly exacerbated. Even if that simply meant RAF fighters operating from airfields further north, the additional control over the skies of the coastal counties of southern England that would have ensued would have radically altered the course of the Battle, if not its outcome. However, such considerations must remain speculation, as must so many others during the course of European history.

*ABOVE*: An ignominious nose-over in soft ground for S9+HK, a Bf 110 D of 2./Erpr. Gr. 210. This view shows the fuselage bomb rack to good effect.

*BELOW*: 3U+JT, a Bf 110 C-4, shot down on 7 October near Corfe Castle. The pilot, Gefr. Bernhard Demmig, survived the crash; his Bordfunker, Ogefr. Josef Bachmann was killed.

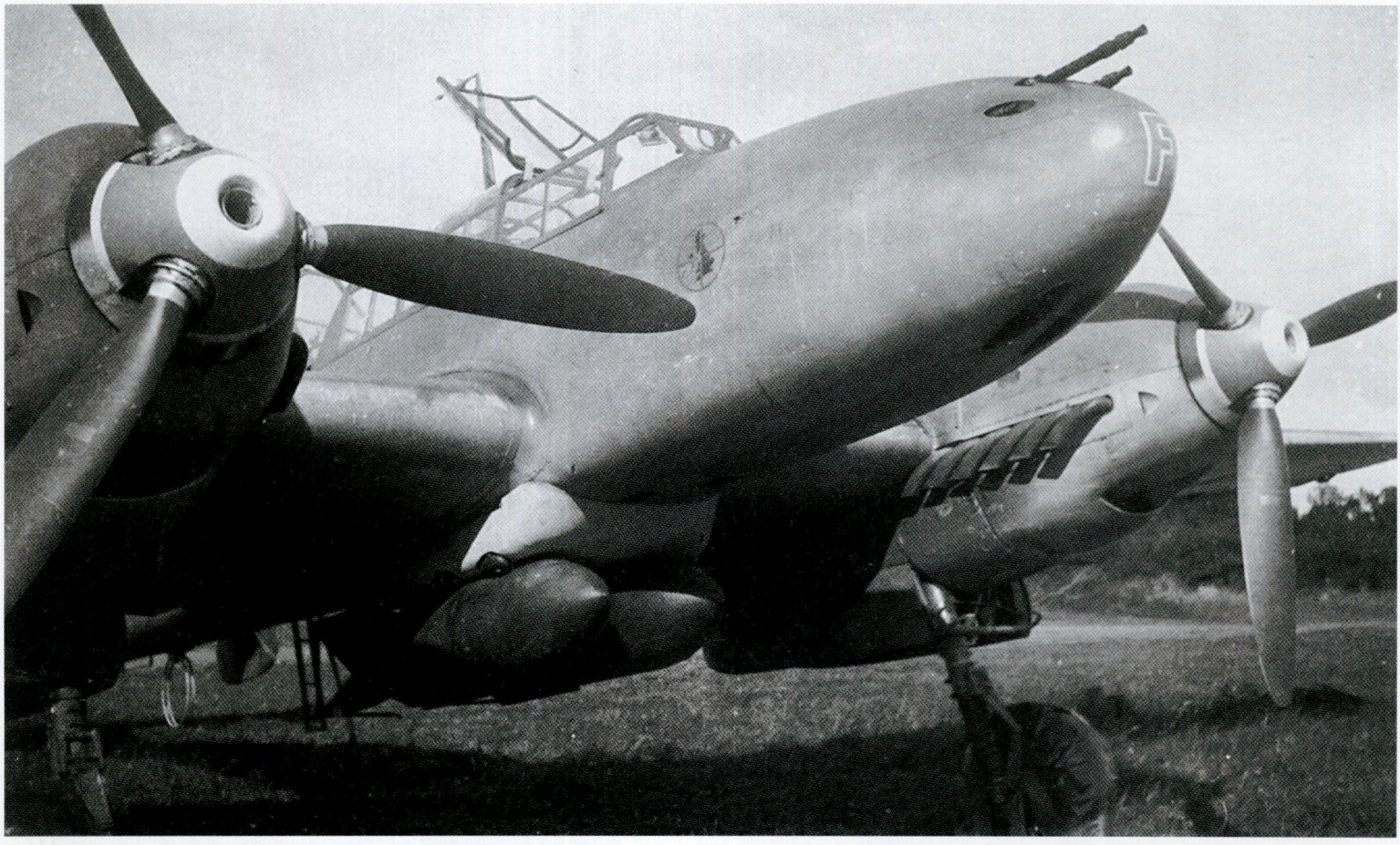
The other direction which proved a success was that of night fighter, a role for which the *Bf 110* was to prove eminently suitable. And several pilots who had cut their teeth in the campaigns of the first sixteen months of the war would go on to excel at the stealth combat that was night fighting. As the war progressed, *Zerstörer* would be found in action in the Mediterranean theatre, across the entire Russian Front, detached for a short period to Iraq, and, as the tide of war turned against Germany, in day time Defence of the Reich. This latter campaign dealt the *Zerstörer* such a blow that their disbandment was complete by July 1944. For those crews which survived to the end of 1940, they would carry into 1941 a sober and realistic assessment of their machine's capabilities against modern single-engined fighters.

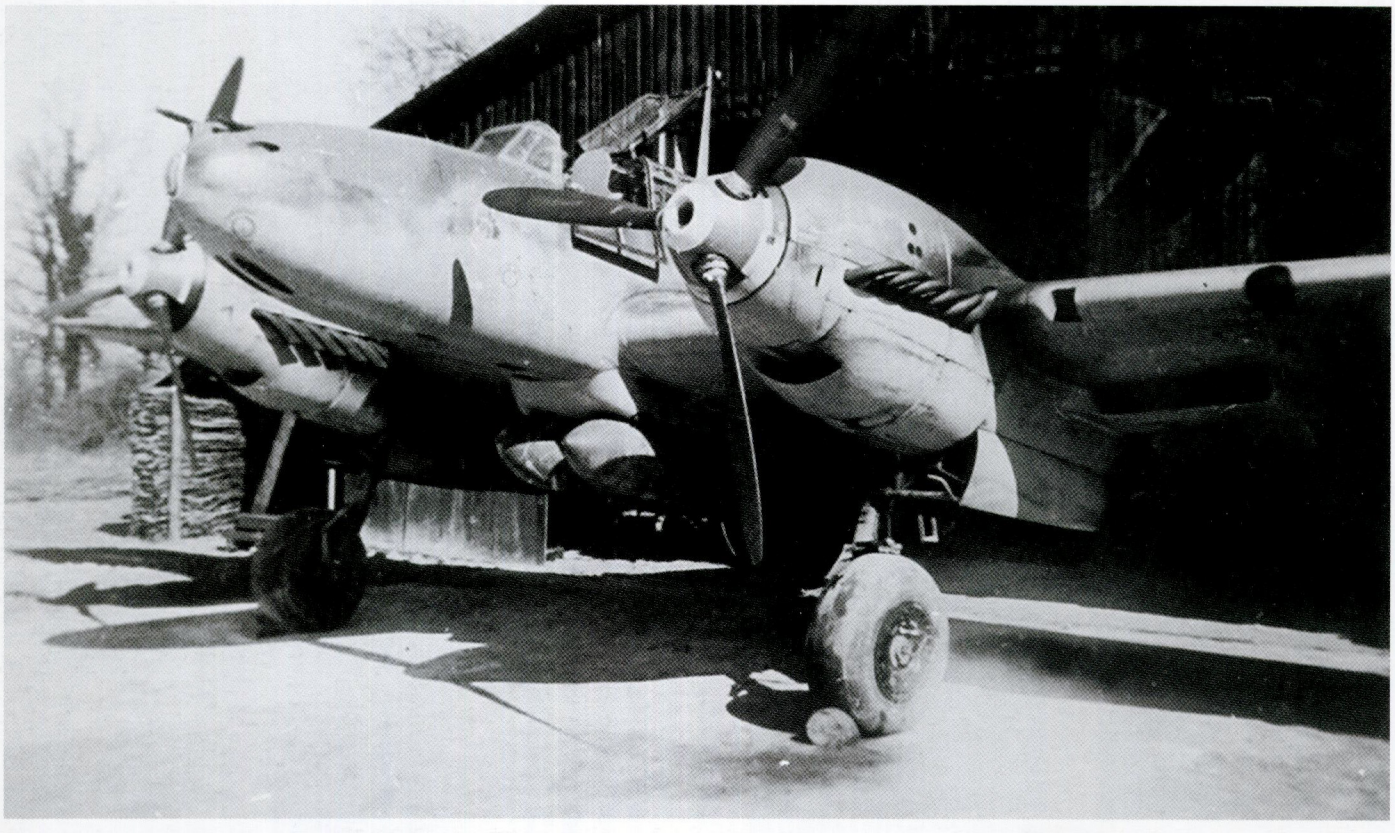
*LEFT*: S9+KH of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210 displaying the usual attributes of the Staffel: individual aircraft letter in blue outlined in white and the usual white/blue/white spinners.



**Messerschmitt Bf 110 E of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210**

**S9+KH displays the late-1940 style of camouflage employed by 1./Erpr. Gr. 210. A light mottle has been applied to the upper half of the fuselage sides. Note the lack of the Bordfunker's central rear canopy panel, a feature of Bf 110s of Erpr. Gr. 210 in 1940. The individual aircraft letter is in blue, and white/blue/white propeller spinners are carried.**



*ABOVE*: S9+FH, a Bf 110 D-0 of 1./Erpr. Gr. 210, believed to be the aircraft flown by the unit's acting Gruppenkommandeur, Oblt. Werner Weymann on 5 October when he and his Bordfunker, Uffz. Erwin Hübner, were shot down into the Channel and posted missing in action. Note the unit emblem, the small letter 'F' on the nose, and the distinctive white/blue/white spinners, unique to 1. Staffel of this unit at the time.

*BELOW*: Erprobungsgruppe 210 remained ranged against England through to April 1941, when it was incorporated into the newly constituted Schnellkampfgeschwader 210. Here, a Bf 110 E, S9+OH, is parked partly inside a hangar. Note the unit emblem, the letter 'O' on the nose and the usual spinner colours.